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**LETTERS**

**ON THE**

**PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND.**

*Works on Mental Philosophy by the same Author.*

ESSAYS ON THE FORMATION AND PUBLICATION OF  
OPINIONS. Third Edition, 1 vol. 8vo.

ESSAYS ON THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH AND ON THE  
PROGRESS OF KNOWLEDGE. Second Edition, 1 vol. 8vo.

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LETTERS  
ON THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN  
MIND.

BY SAMUEL BAILEY.

FIRST SERIES.

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## PREFACE.

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THE origin and design of the following Treatise being fully set forth in the Introductory Letter, it remains only to say that the discussions contained in the volume form a series, which (should the casualties of life permit) will be probably followed at no distant time by another or others on kindred topics.

A cursory inspection of the Table of Contents will show that the author has not yet touched upon a number of related questions of an interesting character, and presenting a wide field for free investigation. On some of these he

hopes, sooner or later, to be able to state the views which a long and patient consideration of them has suggested to his mind.

*Norbury, near Sheffield, Feb. 20th, 1855.*



# CONTENTS.

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	Page
<u>LETTER</u> <u>I. Origin and Design of the present</u>	
<u>Series of Letters</u> -   -   -	1
<u>II. Methods of investigating and speaking</u>	
<u>of the Facts of Consciousness</u> -	9
<u>III. Personification of the Faculties</u>	14
<u>IV. Figurative Language in Philosophical</u>	
<u>Inquiries</u> -   -   -	31
<u>V. Imaginary Mental Transactions</u>	42
<u>VI. Classification of the Phenomena of</u>	
<u>Consciousness</u> -   -   -	54
<u>VII. Sensitive Affections</u> -   -   -	60
<u>VIII. Intellectual Operations: Discerning</u>	
<u>and Conceiving</u> -   -   -	66
<u>IX. Intellectual Operations continued: Be-</u>	
<u>lieving and Reasoning</u> -   -	75
<u>X. Willing</u> -   -   -	82
<u>XI. The alleged Faculties of Reason and</u>	
<u>Understanding</u> -   -   -	92
<u>XII. Ambiguity of certain Terms</u> -   -	103
<u>XIII. Theories of Perception</u> -   -	109

	Page
<u>LETTER XIV. Theories of Perception continued :</u>	
<u>Locke - - - -</u>	<u>115</u>
<u>XV. Theories of Perception continued :</u>	
<u>Berkeley - - - -</u>	<u>124</u>
<u>XVI. Theories of Perception continued :</u>	
<u>Berkeley - - - -</u>	<u>134</u>
<u>XVII. Theories of Perception continued :</u>	
<u>Berkeley, Hume, and Brown -</u>	<u>142</u>
<u>XVIII. Theories of Perception continued :</u>	
<u>Hobbes, D'Alembert, and Stewart -</u>	<u>154</u>
<u>XIX. Theories of Perception continued :</u>	
<u>Kant - - - -</u>	<u>166</u>
<u>XX. Theories of Perception continued :</u>	
<u>Kant - - - -</u>	<u>172</u>
<u>XXI. Ideas - - - -</u>	<u>179</u>
<u>XXII. General Terms - - - -</u>	<u>186</u>
<u>XXIII. Abstract Terms - - - -</u>	<u>195</u>
<u>XXIV. Abstract Terms continued -</u>	<u>206</u>
<u>XXV. Examples of important General and</u>	
<u>Abstract Terms - - - -</u>	<u>215</u>
 <u>NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS - - - -</u>	 <u>233</u>

LETTERS

ON THE

PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND.

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LETTER I.

ORIGIN AND DESIGN OF THE PRESENT SERIES OF  
LETTERS.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You have frequently expressed a wish that I would give you, and eventually the public, a methodical exposition of those views in the Philosophy of the Human Mind which we have so repeatedly, although informally, discussed together.

Against this I can urge neither want of leisure nor want of interest in the subject; and it would be an affectation of modesty to disclaim such an amount of qualification for the task as may be implied by an almost unintermitting meditation upon the principal questions of Philosophy during the greater part of a life which can no longer be termed brief.

The chief obstacle in the way of complying with your request is, I confess, want of adequate motive ; or, if you will, that kind of mental indolence which is not seldom the fruit of it. The requisite materials are already in my mind, I may say, indeed, already stored in various manuscript volumes, although put down in detached memoranda without much method, finish, or connexion.

You know as well as myself the pleasure of mastering (in one's own fancy at least) difficult and interesting subjects, and discussing them in the desultory way of random notes or friendly conversation ; but the process of reducing such speculations to order and precise expression — digesting them, as it is significantly termed, into a methodical treatise — connecting the disparted, marshalling the disorderly, supplying the deficient, labouring at transitions, consulting authorities and verifying assertions and references — constitutes altogether a very different affair. The delight of novelty and invention, of expatiating at will and skipping when convenient, is gone, and the drudgery of task-work succeeds. For this formidable labour some strong motive seems essential. You have named several ; the hope of distinction as one, the prospect of enlightening the world as another — you very wisely did not mention pecuniary profit as a third. But of attaining these ends I see small probability. With regard to the first, I do not apprehend that even the successful accom-

plishment of such a task would greatly extend the reputation, wide or narrow, which any author might before possess; and as for illuminating the world, to the difficulty of furnishing the light must be added the rather considerable impediment that the world is not sensible of being in the dark, and cares nothing for such elucidations. In a word, little effect would result in any way from the publication of a work which could hardly promise itself a score of readers. Where, then, is the inducement for undertaking what you propose? except it be that, taking ages into view, no earnest effort after truth on any subject can be regarded as altogether fruitless; and that the study of philosophy, although it will always be confined to a few, must not on that account be abandoned nor its results suppressed. At all events I have come to the resolution of partially at least acceding to your wishes. Without the formality of a regular treatise, I can, I think, succinctly explain in a series of letters addressed to yourself whatever is essential and peculiar in the views I entertain.

There is an objection in some minds to the treatment of such subjects otherwise than in formal discourses or dissertations. For my part I care little for the mere shape, and would have the philosopher indulge in any form that may happen to please his fancy, whether Essay, Discourse, Dialogue, Lecture, or Epistle. If he has anything to communicate he will probably do it best in the way which his

own taste prescribes : and, whatever that may be, the real method — the arrangement of his thoughts — will, with equal pains, be much the same. I never could enter into Mr. Stewart's objection to Horne Tooke's throwing his etymological speculations into the form of dialogue. It was doubtless the mode best suited to the genius of the man.\*

In this series of letters it is not my intention to aim at giving an account of the whole province of mental philosophy, which would of course involve the repetition of much that has become trite and familiar. I do not contemplate the construction of a system in which every pertinent topic must have its place ; nor yet the composition of an elementary treatise simplifying what is complicated, and making the whole level, as the phrase is, to the meanest capacity : but only an exposition of those parts of the subject on which I seem to myself (erroneously perhaps) to have something new to say, or something not sufficiently recognised to enforce, or which I may hope to place in a clearer light than has hitherto fallen upon them. Hence, although I shall study to be plain and perspicuous, even at the risk of being deemed superficial, I must of necessity take for granted a certain degree of acquaintance on the part of the reader with philosophical questions.

\* Stewart's Essays, p. 232.

The design here announced will not, I trust, be construed as an attempt to produce exclusively something novel and unheard of, instead of what it really will be, an endeavour to select from a wide range of speculation such views as are least likely to have been before presented to the student of philosophy. When an author submits his productions to the public, it is of course implied that he conceives them to contain something new either in matter or manner, else why obtrude them on his neighbours? But still, on first embarking in the inquiry which led to them, he very probably dreamed of nothing more than understanding the subject for his own satisfaction. To set out indeed upon any investigation expressly and purely for the sake of being personally original, or discovering for himself some fortunate novelty, I hold to be one of the last things which a genuine lover of knowledge would think of. Too intent for any such project on finding out what is true, on seizing the very heart of a question, on mastering the whole bearings of a doctrine,—and too glad at all times to be spared the labour of research and reflection by the lucid and complete expositions of his predecessors, when he can meet with them,—it may be safely asserted that his mind has no room for the mere ambition of novelty, although, being human, he cannot fail to be gratified whenever novelty appears to be the result of his inquiries.

In such an attempt as I have here described, I

shall of necessity come into frequent collision with the doctrines of preceding philosophers. This I shall neither sedulously avoid nor yet purposely seek, except as it may contribute to the elucidation of the subject; and I do not mention it as requiring apology, although some of them are writers of deservedly high reputation, for whom I entertain unfeigned respect.

In an age of remarkable progress, in which various systems of false thought and piles of hypothetical facts have crumbled into dust before the steady march of sober science, it would, doubtless, appear somewhat out of season and even ludicrous to apologise for the effects of methodical and careful inquiry on received doctrines and established reputations, be those doctrines and their authors what and who they may.

In respect to the latter, it is a consideration worth weighing by such minds as are more tenacious of personal reputations than anxious for truth, that the manifestation of ability is not to be measured by the permanence of its results, and remains as a fact, conferring perennial renown after the doctrine which called it forth has been stripped of its errors, or wholly superseded.

But, on the subject of my present attempt, a direct scrutiny of facts, independent of preceding opinions, combined with a free and unreserved discussion of such opinions, is, perhaps, more needed than on any other; for it is remarkable



that, although each one has in his own breast all the materials of psychology, yet is he peculiarly prone to take his views regarding it from his predecessors, as if in former times they were nearer to it than we are at the actual moment; as if they possessed some great advantage in studying it over ourselves. Hence he is too apt to look at it from the point of view which has become traditional, instead of taking a survey of it from his own station, and trusting his own eyes.

But it is plain, on reflection, that all the mental operations and affections which constitute the matter of the science are experienced by all of us now as fully as they ever were by any human beings that ever existed. Former ages, whether remote or recent, enjoyed, to say the least, no superiority over the present in point of nearness to the subject, or in any other imaginable way; nor is there the shadow of a reason that we should take implicitly their account of a matter which is perfectly and perpetually open to our own scrutiny, any more than that we should content ourselves with relying on their knowledge of the elementary composition of bodies and on their science of the stars. In each case alike, the field for observation is spread out to us as it was to them, without the necessity of trying to look at it exclusively from their point of view, or with their antiquated microscopic or telescopic instruments; nor is this freedom of examination, as I have already hinted,

and as Pascal long ago remarked, at all incompatible with the truest respect for the abilities and acquirements of the really eminent amongst our predecessors.

Having thus indicated the position which the following speculations design to take, I shall defer the commencement of the subject to another letter.

## LETTER II.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATING AND SPEAKING OF THE  
FACTS OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

It seems singular to me that there should ever have been any doubt as to the mode of studying the subject before us.

The proper method of investigating the facts of consciousness can surely be no other than that which is pursued in physical inquiry. Phenomena are to be observed, discriminated, and classified, and general laws to be inferred from them.

What we have to consider in this department of knowledge, are the mental states and operations of the human being, the causes which produce them, the manner in which they accompany or succeed each other, and the resemblances and differences which we discern amongst them. There is here as plain a field for inquiry as that which is presented to us by the world without; there is an equal call in both cases for rigorous method, for keeping to facts, for discarding mere gratuitous assumptions, and for the scrupulous restriction of every word to one precise and uniform sense; while in dealing with states and events of con-

sciousness, there is, perhaps, a greater demand for nice and subtile discrimination than in treating material phenomena.

In entering upon the ground before us, it is especially needful to note, and I would emphatically press it on your attention, that it is the human being—the man—who perceives and remembers and thinks and feels and reasons and wills, not something distinct or apart from him; and these are the simplest phrases we can employ to designate the acts or events in question.

We speak, indeed, of his mind perceiving and thinking and feeling, which is a ready and even natural mode of describing his states of consciousness or mental movements in contradistinction to those motions and affections of his physical frame which are to be learned from external observation; but in using such phraseology we gain nothing but convenience, and we should be especially careful not to allow it to lead us to any inferences which cannot be deduced equally well from considering and speaking of the human being himself as in action, or as the subject affected. You will find the utility of attending to the caution here given, in some long disputed and perplexing questions.

Adopting this method for the sake of convenience, and with the precaution indicated, we may speak of the states or acts of the human being when he perceives, remembers, imagines and reasons, as operations of the mind under the names

of perception, memory, imagination, and reasoning. In like manner we may speak of his affections when he rejoices, sorrows, fears, and hopes, as emotions or feelings of the mind instead of the man ; but by such phraseology, commodious and indispensable as it is, we do not make the slightest advance either in knowledge or in the explanation of what we know.

All these may also be correctly spoken of as states or events, or phenomena of consciousness ; expressions which are equivalent to the other phrases, but add nothing to them. We do not both perceive, remember, reason, rejoice, and feel conscious of perceiving, remembering, reasoning and rejoicing, or rather, these phrases do not designate separate acts or states ; perceiving is one state or mode of consciousness, remembering is another, reasoning is another, rejoicing is another.

The contrary of this is, nevertheless, frequently asserted ; as, for example, by Dr. Reid, and more recently by M. Cousin, who says, "It is not by consciousness that we feel, or will, or think ; but it is by it we know that we do all this ;" which is tantamount to saying that by consciousness we know we are conscious.

In a similar way, a very sensible writer on Intellectual Philosophy tells us, that consciousness is "the faculty by which the various powers of our own minds are made known to us\* ;" a kind of

\* Elements of Intellectual Philosophy, by R. E. Scott, p. 27.

phraseology to which I shall have immediately to call your especial attention.

You will probably have observed that I have designated perception, memory, conception, imagination, and reasoning as *operations* of the mind.

They are often, however (as by the last author I have had occasion to quote), termed faculties, capacities, or powers; and in popular discourse with great advantage in respect of ease and variety of expression, and with sufficient precision for ordinary purposes; but these are forms of speech from which in accurate speculation we derive little or no assistance, while we are frequently misled by them.

Whatever a man does, whether he perceives or recollects, or imagines, or reasons, or feels, or wills, he must doubtless have the power or faculty, or capacity of doing; just as all other animated beings or inanimate substances must have the power of doing whatever they effect. There is, however, nothing gained to clear or scientific knowledge by introducing the capability in addition to the statement of the simple act, although as a mode of expression it is frequently convenient. "Water quenches thirst," is as expressive as "water has the power of quenching thirst." "Heat melts lead," conveys as much as "heat has the power of melting lead." "The loadstone attracts iron" is as significant as the assertion that it has the power of so affecting that metal.

So in the case of mental operations: the expres-

sion "man perceives, and remembers, and imagines, and reasons," denotes all that is conveyed by the longer phrase, "the mind of man has the faculties of perception, and memory, and imagination, and reasoning." "Man hopes, and fears, and rejoices, and grieves," is a form of speech which expresses just the same meaning as the more circuitous and sonorous phraseology, "the mind of man is endowed with the susceptibilities, or subject to the affections of hope, and fear, and joy, and grief." Further illustrations would be superfluous. Independently of the disadvantages which in science must always attend circuitous, tautological, and figurative expressions that add nothing to the sense, such language in mental philosophy gives rise to particular evils which require especial attention at the outset; and these I purpose to exhibit at a length in some degree proportioned to their importance.

Do not, I implore you, be startled at the prospect of having some of your usual and favourite phrases proscribed. I am speaking of language now merely as an instrument of investigation and of philosophical statement, not as a vehicle of common intercourse, sentiment, and emotion. I wish not to deprive the poetical, the rhetorical, the sensitive, the romantic, or even the innumerable writers and conversers on ordinary topics, of any of their cherished expressions; and, indeed, should be sorry to lose them myself, when, quitting the path of methodical inquiry, I enter into common life, or into the sphere of fancy, taste, and feeling.

## LETTER III.

## PERSONIFICATION OF THE FACULTIES.

THE various forms of speech pointed out in my last letter as more or less prolix and circuitous, although they are perfectly unobjectionable and even needful in common discourse, have led, in philosophical speculation, to great errors, to much perplexity, and to no little mischievous jargon.

One of the chief consequences of such modes of speaking has been that the powers and faculties and susceptibilities to which the operations and affections of the mind are thus ascribed, or under which they are thus grouped, have been personified so to speak, or erected into separate entities distinct from the man himself. They have been represented as acting in the character of independent agents, originating ideas, passing them from one to another, and transacting other business amongst themselves. In this species of phraseology the mind frequently appears a sort of field in which perception, recollection, imagination, reason, will, conscience, and the passions, carry on their operations, like so many powers in alliance with or in hostility to each other. Sometimes one of these powers is supreme and



the others are subordinate ; one usurps authority and another submits ; one reports and others listen ; one deludes and another is deceived. Meanwhile, the mind, or rather the intellectual being himself, is jostled out of sight altogether by transactions in which he appears to have no concern. At other times these powers are described as having dealings with their owner, or master, lending him ministerial assistance, acting under his control or direction, supplying him with evidence or instruction, and enlightening him by revelations, as if he himself were detached or apart from the faculties which he is said to possess and command, and to which he is represented as listening.

The same remarks may be extended to the senses, which are often spoken of as independent of the mind. The *organs* of the senses are doubtless distinct from the mind,—part of the physical frame—but the senses themselves are not separate from the mind. When they are affected (to speak according to common phraseology), such affections are modifications of the mind. When a man sees or hears or feels tactually, it is he himself—the conscious being—who does so, as much as when he thinks, or rejoices, or grieves. To say that his senses do these things, is on a level with using the expressions about reason and imagination performing certain acts to which I have already adverted. It is personifying the senses and raising them into distinct entities ; whereas they are in truth mental

susceptibilities acted upon, or mental affections produced, or, as I should prefer saying, intellectual discernment exercised through the organs of the physical frame. Nor does the matter stop here; but even ideas which are sometimes spoken of as the material or product in which the faculties deal, or about which they are concerned, are themselves personified and held up as independent agents. When such personifications as these become habitual and their character is overlooked, it is not wonderful that extraordinary and even extravagant doctrines are the result.

The danger of the practice seems to have struck Hobbes, who incidentally notices, "that metaphorical speech of attributing command and subjection to the faculties of the soul, as if they made a commonwealth or family within themselves and could speak one to another, which is very improper in searching the truth of a question."\*

Locke, in one part of his great Essay, seems fully alive to the evil consequences of such phraseology, although he has not, by any means, succeeded in avoiding it. "I suspect," he says, "that this way of speaking of faculties has led many into a confused notion of so many distinct agents in us, which had their several provinces and authorities, and did command, obey, and perform several actions as so many distinct beings; which has been no small

\* Of Liberty and Necessity.

occasion of wrangling, obscurity, and uncertainty in questions relating to them.”\*

Leibnitz, too, notices the subject in his “New Comments on the Essay on Human Understanding.” In this work, which, you are aware, is in Dialogue, he introduces a disciple of Locke under the name of Philalethes as saying, “We commonly speak of the understanding and the will as two faculties of the soul, a sufficiently convenient term if we make use of it, as we ought to make use of all words, with due precaution that they shall not give rise to any confusion in men’s thoughts, which I suspect has been the case here. And when it is said that the will is that superior faculty of the soul which regulates and orders all things; that it is or is not free; that it rules the inferior faculties; that it follows the dictates of the understanding; although these expressions may be understood in a clear and distinct sense, yet I fear, nevertheless, that they have suggested to many persons the confused idea of so many agents who have their distinct action within us.”

In answer to this, the other interlocutor, Theophilus, who speaks for the author himself, remarks, “This is a question which has exercised the schools for a long time, to wit, whether there is a real distinction between the soul and its faculties. The Realists have said yes, the Nominalists no. And the same question has been agitated about the

Essay, book 2. chap. 21.

C

reality of several other *Abstract Entities*, which must follow the fate of the others. But I do not think it needful to decide this question here, and to plunge amongst these thorns."\*

Some of the doctrines to which this language has led I shall hereafter examine; but at present I shall content myself with citing a few specimens of current phraseology from eminent writers, in order to substantiate or elucidate the representations I have given, whether the passages exhibit only traditional forms of speech, or are merely casual lapses into such expressions without further result, or indicate essential features in a philosophical system, or show how speculation may be led astray by the loose and inconsiderate employment of words.

The incidental use of the phraseology here spoken of is frequent even with Locke, who, as we have seen, was fully aware of the evils to which it might lead. In one place he speaks of the mind being every day *informed by the senses*; in another of reason *procuring our assent*; and in a third he curiously enough asserts that *the mind furnishes the understanding* with the ideas of its own operations.

Instances abound in which the intelligence is stated to be communicated, not by one faculty to another, as in these passages from Locke, but by

\* *Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humain*, livre 2. chap. 21. In Erdman's edition of Leibnitz's *Opera Philosophica*, p. 251.

some of them to the owner himself. "Our senses," says Hume, "inform us of the colour, weight, and consistence of bread; but neither sense nor reason can ever inform us of those qualities which fit it for the nourishment and support of the human body."\* "It is the business of memory," remarks Leibnitz, "to retain what we know, and of reminiscence to represent it to us."† Dr. Reid in his *Essays* says, "When we attend to any change that happens in nature, judgment informs us that there must be a cause of this change."‡

And, in another passage of the same *Essay*, he speaks of the several faculties delivering their testimony — of course to their possessor, to whom nature in her bounty had, we are told, presented the whole set of intellectual powers enumerated. His words are, "Thus the faculties of consciousness, of memory, of external sense, and of reason, are all equally the gifts of nature. No good reason can be assigned for receiving the testimony of one of them, which is not of equal force with regard to the others. The greatest sceptics admit the testimony of consciousness, and allow that what it testifies is to be held as a first principle."

Dr. Beattie supplies us with a passage in which one faculty is asserted to have rightful predominance over another. "All sound reasoning must

\* Sceptical Doubts.

† *Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humain*, liv. 1. chap. 1.

‡ *Essays on the Powers of the Mind*, *Essay* 6. chap. 1.

ultimately rest," he says, "on the principles of common sense, that is, on principles intuitively certain or intuitively probable; and consequently common sense is the ultimate judge of truth, to which reason must continually act in subordination."<sup>\*</sup>

In a similar strain Dr. Reid had previously said, "Methinks, therefore, it were better to make a virtue of necessity; and since we cannot get rid of the vulgar notion and belief of an external world, to reconcile our reason to it as well as we can; for if Reason should stomach and fret ever so much at this yoke, she cannot throw it off: if she will not be the servant of Common Sense, she must be her slave."<sup>†</sup>

In the following extract there is also an attribution of superiority, as well as a description of one set of faculties engaged in observing events and making a report of their observations to another. "The world has been likened," says the learned author of *Hermes*, "to a variety of things, but it appears to resemble no one more than some moving spectacle (such as a procession or a triumph) that abounds in every part with splendid objects, some of which are still departing as fast as others make their appearance. The senses look on while the sight passes, perceiving as much as is immediately

<sup>\*</sup> Essay on Truth, part 1. chap. 1.

<sup>†</sup> Inquiry into the Human Mind, chap. 5. sect. 7.

present, which they report with tolerable accuracy to the soul's superior powers." \*

So we are told by Père Buffier, that "the senses always give a faithful report of what appears to them;" and that "the senses never deceive us, but we deceive ourselves by our own indiscretion with respect to the faithful report of our senses." †

An extract or two from the writings of Pascal will exhibit the fanciful way of speaking in reference to the reciprocal action and counteraction of the faculties, which had, in his time, become traditional, and in fact still remains so.

He differs from Père Buffier, it will be observed, with regard to the faithfulness of the senses, although on this point he is by no means consistent. ‡ "Reason and the senses," he says, "the two principles of truth, besides that they are not always sincere, *reciprocally delude each other*. The senses delude the reason by false appearances; and the trickery they practise is passed on themselves in return. Reason takes its revenge. The passions of the soul disturb the senses, and make upon them vexatious impressions. They vie with each other in deceiving and being deceived." §

Again. "I shall confine myself therefore to such

\* Harris's *Hermes*, book 1. chap. 7.

† *First Truths*, part 1. chap. 16.

‡ "The mind," he says in another place, "is naturally correct in its perceptions of what it sees, just as the notices of the senses are always true."—*Detached Moral Thoughts*.

§ *Thoughts. On the Uncertainty of Natural Knowledge.*

truths as lie within our reach ; and in reference to these I say, that the *understanding* and the *heart* are the *gates* by which they are admitted into the soul ; but that very few enter by the *understanding*, while on the other hand they are introduced in crowds without the counsel of *reason*, by the rash caprices of the *will*.\*

An expression in one of Dugald Stewart's "Philosophical Essays," curiously enough illustrates the looseness of phraseology on these subjects in which philosophers indulge: he gravely maintains that "the exercise of a particular faculty furnishes the occasion on which certain simple notions are by the laws of our constitution presented to our thoughts."† Notions presented to thoughts!

Dr. Brown, although aware of the evil effects of such language, is not much behind his master, when he tells us, that the mind "must, by the very nature of the feelings, be a believer in the outward things which its perceptions seem to point out to it."‡

And Kant, to whose peculiarities of expression I shall by and by more particularly advert, personifying acts of the mind in a similar strain, affirms that "certain cognitions, by means of conceptions, extend the compass of our judgments."

\* Thoughts. On the Art of Persuasion.

† Philosophical Essays, p. 82.

‡ Sketch of a System, p. 117.



From countless other writers similar passages to those already cited might be adduced. One other I will here quote for the purpose of drawing your attention to a form of speech already incidentally noticed, which is common to many of them. "Our senses," says one writer, "inform us of the existence of certain sensible qualities; our reason tells us that these qualities must be qualities of something."

Here, as in many of the preceding extracts, it will be observed that our senses and our reason are spoken of as things distinct from ourselves as well as from each other; and we, being apart from those faculties, *i. e.* without senses and reason, are still capable of receiving information from them.

In regard to the expressions quoted about the information and evidence of our senses, if it be alleged that the organs of the senses are meant, the matter would not be greatly bettered. In that case it would be something like saying that for an object seen through a window we have the evidence of the glass.

It is not always that the separation of the faculties from ourselves is merely implied; it is occasionally distinctly asserted. Cudworth, for example, says, "In false opinions the perception of the understanding power is not false but only obscure. It is *not the understanding power* or nature in us that erreth, but it is *we ourselves* who

err, when we rashly and unwarily assent to things not clearly perceived by it."\*

This distinct separation of our powers from ourselves has been still more explicitly maintained by later writers, as I shall have immediately to notice.

Perhaps the phraseology on which I am animadverting has been carried to the greatest extreme by Kant and his followers, some of whose doctrines, as I may hereafter have occasion to point out, are founded on the personification of the faculties, and the fabrication of other entities out of the mere forms of language. At present I restrict myself to citing instances in which the language animadverted upon occurs.

It is the doctrine of Kant, we are told, that "sensibility has given us intuitions; understanding has given us conceptions; reason reduces the variety of conceptions to their utmost unity."

Here *we* are separate from sensibility, understanding, and reason, and in this destitute condition are indebted to those faculties for imparting to us their respective productions, namely, intuitions, conceptions, and conclusions. It may be fairly asked, What is there left in *us* when thus denuded capable of receiving such contributions?

Other examples abound in the writings of this philosopher. Here is another version of the same

\* Intellectual System, book 1. chap. 5. In the edition before me, dated 1845, in 3 vols., the above passage occurs, vol. 3 p. 34.

doctrine: "All our cognition begins from the senses—proceeds thence to the understanding—and finishes in reason, beyond which nothing higher is met with in us to elaborate and to bring under the highest unity of thought, the matter of the intuition." \*

In this description, knowledge migrates from one faculty to another, till, on getting to the workshop of reason, it is elaborated into the highest unity of thought.

He says, in another place, "Neither of these faculties or capacities can exchange its functions. The understanding cannot perceive, and the senses cannot think." †

These passages exhibit the faculties acting as independent entities, without reference to the owner, except as a recipient of their bounty. The following one is a good instance of the ministerial assistance, which he on other occasions is represented as deriving from them.

"In every syllogism," says Kant, "I first think a rule (major) by means of the *understanding*. Secondly, I subsume a cognition under the condition of the rule (minor) by means of the *faculty of judgment*. Lastly, I determine my cognition by means of the predicate of the rule (conclusio), consequently a priori *by reason*." ‡

\* Critick of Pure Reason. Of Reason in General.

† Ibid. Of Logic in General.

‡ Ibid. Of the Logical Use of Reason.

Thus the intelligent being, like a constitutional monarch, transacts all regular business through his ministers; as if the Understanding were Secretary of State for the Home Department; the faculty of Judgment, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas; and Reason, First Lord of the Treasury.

Sometimes one faculty is exhibited as devolving affairs of a certain description on another: *Pure reason*," says Kant, "leaves every thing to the *understanding* which refers immediately to the objects of the intuition, or rather to their synthesis in the imagination."\*

Cousin almost surpasses Kant in this kind of language.

"The senses," he says, "attest the existence of concrete quantities and bodies; consciousness, the internal sense, attests the presence of a succession of thoughts, and of all the phenomena which pertain to personal identity. But at the same time reason intervenes and pronounces that the relations of the quantities in question are abstract, universal, and necessary."† The man seems here set aside, while the senses, consciousness, and reason, do all the work for him.

The following is another instance of strange phraseology by the same author.

"In my theory, intellectual intuition, without

\* Critick of Pure Reason. Of Transcendental Ideas.

† Elements of Psychology, p. 150. being a translation from Cousin, published under that title by Dr. Henry, United States.

being personal and subjective, attains to the knowledge of being, from the bosom of consciousness." Here not only is the man set aside, but the reader is bewildered by the disguise under which what may possibly be very simple facts are presented.

Again, the same writer tells us :—

"Sensation by itself is deprived of all light, and does not know itself, while reason knows itself and knows all the rest, and goes beyond the sphere of 'the me,' because it does not belong to me."\*

In this and other analogous passages, following certain German and even English philosophers, he turns reason out of the mind altogether, and treats it as a sort of external light, thus carrying the representation of the faculties as distinct entities to its utmost extreme. "Reason," he says, in another place, "although connected with personality, is essentially distinct from it." Once more, he describes reason as filling the most various parts : first, being one of the elements of consciousness ; secondly, lending it a foundation ; and thirdly, constituting its light.

"Consciousness," he says, "although composed of three integrant and inseparable elements, borrows its most immediate foundation from reason, without which no knowledge would be possible, and consequently no consciousness. Sensibility is the external condition of consciousness ; the will is its centre ; and reason its light."

\* *Fragmens Philosophiques*. Preface, p. 22.

I foresee that you (or if not you some one else) will be up in arms in defence of many of the expressions I have quoted. You will taunt me, perhaps, with hypercriticism; with a prosaic hostility to metaphorical language; with fastidious comments, which, if heeded, could tend only to the impoverishment of style. "What evil," I hear you exclaim, "can arise from figurative phrases of this description, so requisite for the vivacity, if not for the existence, of composition? Your next objection, I suppose, will be to the personifications of poetry. Woe to such lines as

‘ These shall the fiery passions tear,  
The vultures of the mind,  
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,  
And Shame that skulks behind.’

As to figurative language generally, you yourself cannot possibly avoid it. I will undertake to find in the Series of Letters you are now writing a hundred instances in which you slide, without being able to stop yourself, into metaphorical expressions and even personifications such as you condemn."

Doubtless you may: but I must entreat you to reserve your burst of feeling till you have seen farther into the views which I have to unfold, when I hope your very natural and laudable fervour in vindication of your old friends will subside of itself.

I do not, I repeat, object to the prevalent mode of speaking of powers and faculties on ordinary occasions, any more than I object to the practice of a friend of mine who measures distances with tolerable accuracy by striding over the ground.

But the methodical investigation of the facts of consciousness is not an ordinary but a special business, requiring as much closeness in the description of phenomena and precision in the terms employed, as any department of physical or mathematical science; and he who will not trouble himself to aim at this precision (always very difficult of attainment) is as unfit for philosophical inquiry as my friend with his crural mode of ascertaining distances would be ill-calculated for measuring a whole country and rivalling the accuracy of a trigonometrical survey.

As another illustration I will add, that I would not willingly part with such convenient terms as reason, memory, understanding, conscience, will, and the rest, any more than I would dispense with such indefinite yet useful words as few, several, many, numerous: but as I should not much regard any writer on statistics who, instead of telling us that every marriage in a particular country produced on an average four children, and that three-fifths of the population could read and write, informed us that there were *several* offspring to a marriage and that *many* of the people possessed the humble accomplishments referred to; so I should

not expect much from a metaphysician who busied himself with describing the powers and faculties of the human mind, and their dealings with each other and with their owner, instead of simply tracing, classifying, and referring to their causes, the states or acts of which we are conscious.



## LETTER IV.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN PHILOSOPHICAL  
INQUIRIES.

BEFORE proceeding further it may be well to resume the particular topic slightly touched upon at the conclusion of my last letter,—the objection, namely, that the citations are many of them only samples of common forms and figures of speech, which it would be mere fastidiousness to reject, which are of little moment, and which may be regarded, in the main, as unexceptionable.

I am quite aware that some — indeed most — of the expressions I have cited, are metaphorical, not intended to be put to the torture of a literal construction ; and are, in fact, the current phraseology of good writers : but at the same time I cannot grant that the use of such language by writers expressly engaged in philosophical inquiries is of small importance. Some of the passages which are only incidental examples were introduced along with others of a less inconsequential character, partly as a ready means of showing what the expressions thus employed as a matter of course really imply, and their want of adaptation to exact thinking ; and partly because phraseology of this kind on common occasions, by inducing a habit of being content with the vague and the unmeaning, naturally smooths the way for laxity in the statement of

important doctrines, and consequently for erroneous conclusions. Language which in itself is perfectly unexceptionable in ordinary writing, thus easily becomes obstructive or delusive in philosophical speculations, such as those from which I have selected my principal examples. Loose phraseology especially of a metaphorical character, however sanctioned by custom, may be confidently pronounced incompatible, either in an author or in the reader who looks to him for instruction, with clear and precise thoughts on the subjects in the discussion of which it is employed; unless, indeed, the author perpetually keeps its character in view, and the reader is at the continual trouble of translating it into more exact expressions; efforts which, since they must be unceasing to be effectual, can be expected from neither.

It is hence an indispensable rule in the prosecution of science that facts should be stated in the simplest, the most direct, and least figurative language we can select: but if this can be requisite in one science more than another, it is in the philosophy of mind, in which we have no other resource than using terms borrowed from material phenomena and applied originally in a metaphorical sense, but subsequently worn, in many instances, into literal or half-literal and very unsteady acceptations. From this cause we are in mental science exposed to the perpetual danger of imposing on ourselves and others by vague and indefinite phrases. The

paramount aim of a writer in this department of inquiry should obviously be to send the reader in the directest manner to his own recollections of what he has perceived and thought and felt. Simplicity, perspicuity, precision and literalness are, for this purpose, alike demanded.

Although it is undoubtedly true that, from the very structure of language, and indeed from the very nature of the mind, figurative phrases cannot on these subjects be wholly excluded; yet they may be certainly avoided to a great extent, and such as, though originally metaphorical, have completely lost that character be preferred. The difficulty of doing it is one reason the more for the utmost care in the choice of our expressions. What need, for example, is there for a philosophical writer, when speaking of a moving spectacle or procession, to tell us, as Harris does in a sentence extracted in my last Letter, that "the senses look on and report to the soul's superior powers," meaning simply that we perceive what is passing?

There are, it appears to me, two principal evils to which figurative phrases in philosophical inquiries give rise.

1. Even when they are really illustrative or representative of facts, the mind is apt to be confused and misled by receiving from them either indefinite or false impressions, and to draw inferences forgetful of their symbolical character; a remark that will apply in some degree to formal similes as well

as to the briefer symbolical expedient of metaphors.

2. They are often, however, introduced without any basis of facts, without any real literal meaning corresponding to the metaphorical one, and thus usurp the place of knowledge ; in other words, they are frequently expressive only of fictions, pleasing the imagination and satisfying the understanding with the mere semblance of significancy.

If you will turn to the two extracts from the writings of Pascal in my last Letter, you will find some illustration of these remarks. Observe how exceedingly figurative his expressions are ; how bare of real meaning many of them appear ; and how they even bewilder the author himself. In the first he speaks of reason and the senses tricking each other, and the former taking its revenge on the latter ; but when he comes to describe the manner of it, we find that it is not reason but the passions which inflict the vengeance. In the second extract he describes the understanding and the heart as the gates for admitting truths into the soul, and complains, curiously enough, of the crowds—not of errors but of truths—which are admitted capriciously by the will ; whereas one would think it desirable to admit truths even in crowds, and by the will or any other door or door-keeper. Such are the futility and confusion even in a profound philosopher, consequent on the careless and lavish use of metaphorical language in treating of the mind.

Locke goes so far as to condemn "figurative speeches and allusion" altogether, "in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct," and regards them as the invention of rhetoric to mislead the judgment; adding that, "where truth and knowledge are concerned they cannot but be thought a great fault either of the language or person that makes use of them." \*

It is curious, however, to observe how freely he sometimes indulges in what he so rigorously condemns; as in that celebrated passage in which, with a beauty and pathos seldom exceeded, he speaks of the transitory character of our reminiscences.

"There seems to be a constant decay," he says, "of all our ideas, even of those which are struck deepest and in minds the most retentive; so that if they be not sometimes renewed by repeated exercise of the senses, or reflection on those kind of objects which at first occasioned them, the print wears out, and at last there is nothing to be seen. *Thus the ideas, as well as children, of our youth, often die before us: and our minds represent to us those tombs, to which we are approaching; where though the brass and marble remain, yet the inscriptions are effaced by time, and the imagery moulders away. The pictures drawn in our minds are laid in fading colours, and if not sometimes refreshed vanish and disappear.*" †

\* Essay on Human Understanding, book 3. chap. 10.

† Ibid., book 2. chap. 10.

Here we have at least two similes and as many metaphors; and in the sequel to this passage he continues very happily to heap one figurative illustration on another.

Although in our admiration of all this we may acquit it (to use his own language) of insinuating wrong ideas and misleading the judgment, we cannot award to it the merit of contributing to the progress of the subject in hand.

In truth his trespasses in this respect against his own precept are rather conspicuous, and sometimes lead him astray.

It is remarkable, too, that Hume, when descanting upon the injurious effects on the pursuit of truth, of giving way to the imagination, indulges in a comparison which may be fairly placed, in point of felicity as well as momentary contravention of his own doctrine, on a level with any of the figurative illustrations of Locke.

"Nothing," he tells us, "is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers. Men of bright fancies may in this respect be compared to those angels whom the Scripture represents as covering their eyes with their wings." \*

Delighted as we may be at meeting with brilliant passages like these in the dreary pages of meta-

\* Treatise on Human Nature, vol. I. p. 352.

physical speculation, it is manifest that if they cannot be charged with embroiling our thoughts, they do not make us understand the subject better, or give precision to our knowledge; at the utmost they can only enliven it and impress it on the memory—exceedingly desirable effects when they can be obtained without the risk that Locke and Hume describe.

But there is less danger, if I mistake not, to precision of thought from similes than from metaphors. Similes are by their structure confessedly illustrations comparing two distinct things which cannot easily be confounded. Metaphors, on the other hand, although essentially of like character, represent or assert one thing by means of another; whence the symbolical is frequently taken as the literal meaning, and consequences are drawn from it accordingly which have no foundation in fact. The metaphor of Locke, Leibnitz, and others before and after them, describing ideas as being engraven on the mind, has had a share in begetting strange doctrines. Although similes are less apt to mislead in the same way, they sometimes give a wrong bias to our thoughts, and cause us to deem our apprehension of a subject to be more complete than it is.

I have little doubt that Locke's celebrated comparison of the understanding to a dark closet with a few little openings to let in ideas of things without, has tended to both these results.

Kant, who is redundant in figurative language,

as I shall hereafter have occasion to repeat, and is often led astray by it, has combined both the simile and the metaphor in the following passage; but, while he has encountered the danger incident to both, he has not succeeded, like Locke and Hume, in vividly impressing his own view on his readers. He seems to me to be trying to illustrate one imaginary circumstance by another when the points of analogy are anything but clear, and he soon becomes confused and obscure.

“The light dove,” he writes, “whilst in its free flight it divides the air whose resistance it feels, might entertain the supposition that it would succeed much better in airless space. Just in the same way, Plato abandoned the sensible world, because it set such narrow limits to the understanding, and hazarded himself beyond it, upon the wings of ideas into the void space of the pure understanding: he did not remark that he made no way by his efforts, since he had no counter-pressure, as it were, for support, whereupon he could rest, and whereby he could employ his power in order to make the understanding move onward.”\* This is clumsy enough it must be owned, and altogether wanting in circumstances of analogy; and it scarcely needs indicating that Plato is here first represented as hazarding himself on the wings of ideas in the void space of the understanding, and

\* Critick of Pure Reason, sect. 3., Introduction.



then as unable, for want of counter-pressure, not only to move onward himself, but to make the said understanding (the void space) move onward.

Similes managed in this manner may undoubtedly be well spared from philosophical writings, as they have no tendency to make us conceive more vividly or remember better what they are brought to elucidate. In truth the reader rises from them with perplexed if not erroneous impressions. They are both the signs and the causes of confusion. An English author (I may mention by the way) has availed himself of the same natural circumstance as a metaphor with much more felicity. After showing how vain and futile is the attempt to get rid of the exercise of our reasoning faculty, and replace it by anything of higher authority, he proceeds: "In every endeavour to elevate ourselves above reason, we are seeking to rise beyond the atmosphere with wings which cannot soar but by beating the air."\*

The evils incident to figurative expressions in philosophical statements and reasoning are acknowledged on all hands. As to the remedy there is not the same consent.

Dugald Stewart, after citing the recommendation of Du Marsais, that figurative language should be wholly excluded from philosophical discussions, and also the comment of D'Alembert upon it that, how-

\* The Rationale of Religious Enquiry, by James Martineau, p. 48.

ever desirable it is to banish such language as much as possible, it is impracticable to do it entirely, proceeds to say, that neither of these writers has hit on the only effectual remedy, namely, to vary the metaphors we employ.\* Although this expedient might, doubtless, be useful in certain cases, it does not appear to go to the root of the evil, inasmuch as the employment of a metaphor even once might lead to what is chiefly to be avoided — false conclusions. The best expedients seem to me, as I have before suggested, first to make use of those words, as far as we can, which, to borrow the description of them given by Mr. Stewart himself, have “lost their pedigree,” or ceased to be metaphorical; and, secondly, following D’Alembert’s advice, to be on our guard against allowing metaphorical expressions to pervert our judgments, by becoming, as I apprehend him to mean, the foundation of our inferences. But I must check myself in this kind of rambling comment. I find that I have inadvertently digressed into a dissertation respecting the effect of figurative language in general on philosophical discussions. What my subject led me to show was, the mode in which writers on philosophy, to the detriment of their science, have treated the mental faculties as distinct both from the mind and from each other, and it has been only to guard myself from the possible charge of

\* Philosophical Essays. Essay 5. chap. 3.

having mistaken figurative phrases for more than they were intended to convey, and over-estimated their consequences, that I have entered into a consideration of the general tendency of such phrases to misdirect us in psychological inquiries.

Much of the language I have quoted describes the transactions of these faculties as if they were real facts. If it is to be taken as figurative, it must be characterised as sometimes shadowing forth realities with more or less confusion and indistinctness ; but, perhaps, still oftener presenting us with metaphors, without any realities underlying them — pure chimeras of the imagination—mere unsubstantial substitutes for knowledge.

One of the worst consequences, indeed, of treating the faculties as distinct entities has manifested itself in the great number of fictitious facts, whether arrayed in a figurative garb or not, which are constantly adduced in the description or statement of mental phenomena, or in theorising to account for them.

This consequence, however, which I have already slightly glanced at, forms too important a feature of the subject to be dismissed with a cursory notice, and I will resume it in a separate Letter.

## LETTER V.

## IMAGINARY MENTAL TRANSACTIONS.

AMONGST the modes in which the practice of erecting the faculties into distinct and independent agents has vitiated the philosophy of the human mind, one of the principal, as I noticed in my last Letter, has been the consequent invention of a great number of imaginary mental transactions. The visionary forces having been brought into the field, there appears to have been an irresistible propensity in metaphysicians to find them employment, by putting them through a variety of evolutions, by which no real advance has been effected. We are continually made spectators of mock fights without any real battle. We are taken to Chobham instead of to Waterloo or to Inkermann.

To drop the metaphor, which stares me in the face as a little inconsistent with my own doctrine, I think it will be found that the practice in question has led philosophers into the very prevalent error of assuming and alleging purely imaginary circumstances in the description and explanation of mental phenomena.

Occasionally these imaginary facts are mixed up

with figurative descriptions of real facts, difficult to be recognised in their metaphorical garb; the whole forming an extraordinary and perplexing exhibition. To common apprehension the science of mind is altogether so unsubstantial and shadowy, that such imaginary circumstances, if plausibly represented, appear to harmonise with positive events of consciousness, and are often received with unhesitating facility.

If you and my other readers will take the trouble of scrutinising philosophical writings with a view to this point, you will be surprised at the extent to which the practice in question has been carried, far beyond what you would conceive from my representation of it.

Nine-tenths of the speculations of transcendental philosophers, as far as they have come under my observation, appear to be made up of absolutely imaginary events.

To make the subject plain, it may be needful to remind you that all the events and facts in the world may be arranged under two heads — mental facts, and physical facts.

In the philosophy of the human mind we have to deal with both, because changes in our physical frame are not only indispensable for the perception of external objects, but are continually producing other variations in the state of our minds; and such variations of intellect or emotion again affect the body, as is obvious in the case of voluntary actions.

When a man, for example, is in a low, sluggish condition of thought and feeling, the application of a stimulating substance to his stomach will enliven both: while, on the other hand, the sudden announcement of calamity may deprive that organ for the moment of its usual vigour, at the same time that it excites the powers of utterance to extraordinary exertion. And so in innumerable other instances. Indeed, there is every reason to conclude that no mental state arises without having been preceded by a physical change in the body, and without itself in turn producing such a change.

Whether, nevertheless, this is true or not, one thing is plain, that mental facts and physical facts, even when there is the clearest dependence of one on the other, are distinct as objects of knowledge.

Mental facts can be gathered only from consciousness, or, more correctly, are states and events of consciousness; and physical facts, being states and events of matter, can be gathered only from external observation.

There is, indeed, one class of facts in which there may be some ambiguity—I mean automatic actions, which, originally the result of distinct willing, seem sometimes to go on from the connexion of one nervous state with another, without any conscious effort on our part, as in playing while absorbed in reverie an often repeated tune on a musical instrument. But even here the motions of the fingers are physical, and are matters of external observa-

tion. The only question is, whether they are severally preceded by mental acts.

Hence, there is a simple inquiry always to be made, in the case of descriptions and explanations of mental phenomena,—are the descriptive or explanatory facts mental or physical? If they are neither, they are of course nonentities—mere creatures of assumption or hypothesis: but even when they are distinctly either one or the other in character as alleged, they may be purely imaginary or fictitious. There is consequently a further inquiry to be made, after determining the class to which they belong; namely, if they are mental, whether they are such as we are inwardly conscious of; if they are physical, whether they are such as can be externally observed.

A rigorous questioning of this sort would show that many celebrated explanations and theories turn altogether on alleged facts of this fictitious or imaginary character.

It is deserving of especial remark how exceedingly prevalent is the assumption of imaginary agents and incidents in explaining what has been termed the philosophy of the senses; in treating of which there is often a mixture, and sometimes a confusion, of mental and physical circumstances. Of this practice I have adduced some glaring instances in my Discourses on Various Subjects, recently published; especially in the Discourse on the Paradoxes of Vision, to which I must take

the liberty of referring you, since to repeat the examples here at length would break the continuity of my present train of thought. I shall content myself with citing from the work on short specimen of this frequent error in treating the phenomena of perception. It is contained in a passage from the pen of no less a philosopher than Sir Isaac Newton, who, in a letter to Briggs, where he is speaking of the pictures on the retina, says, "Those pictures transmit *motional pictures* into the sensorium in the same situation; and by the situation of these motional pictures one to another, the soul judges of the situation of things without." Here the alleged existence of motional pictures, their transmission to the sensorium, and the soul's judging by them of the situation of things without, are plainly not facts which we can externally observe; neither are they facts of which we are conscious; and consequently, according to the rule already given, they must be pronounced fictitious or imaginary.

Newton was on his guard against systematic suppositions in physical science — "*hypotheses non fingo*;" but, not being equally at home in mental philosophy, he was not equally vigilant against those incidental assumptions which, apparently insignificant, insidiously intrude themselves into this department of inquiry, and vitiate our speculations. In regard to such matters he did not certainly rise above the level of his age;



nor could it be reasonably expected that he should.

Several of the passages adduced in a former Letter to exemplify the way in which the faculties are treated as distinct entities, also exemplify the error at present under consideration ; into which, as I have already intimated, that mode of handling the subject is almost sure to betray the philosopher who resorts to it. When I read in the pages of Kant, or of his expositors, that "all our cognition begins from the senses, proceeds thence to the understanding, and finishes in reason," I examine whether I am conscious of the two latter events, which are clearly not of a physical character, and I do not find that I am conscious of such an event or operation as knowledge proceeding from the senses to the understanding, nor of the subsequent operation of its finishing in reason.

Described as they are in the passage quoted, such processes appear to me wholly fictitious. What I am conscious of is, that I perceive external objects which is itself as much an act of the understanding, that is, of an intelligent being, as anything can be, and of itself constitutes knowledge ; that I afterwards think, or may think, upon such objects ; and that I frequently draw conclusions regarding them.

If this were all that Kant intended, the described processes might be vindicated from

the charge of being fictitious ; but, in that case, he would be exposed to the sinister compliment of having succeeded in disguising very simple facts in a dress woven by his imagination.

The truth is, that the language of the philosopher of Königsberg, as I have already remarked, is exceedingly figurative ; and it is frequently difficult, in following his cumbrous and elaborate sentences, to distinguish what is only imaginative from what is imaginary — that for which there is some foundation in fact, however it may be disguised in expression, from that which is purely fictitious.

Both his fictions and his figures, however, seem to have arisen, in a great measure, from treating the faculties as distinct and independent agents ; many of them at least could not have well existed without that misleading method of regarding the subject.

In elucidation of this point read the following extract from his Critick : —

Speaking of Hume, he says, “ As he knew no difference between the well-founded pretensions of *the understanding* and the dialectical pretensions of *reason*, against which, however, his attacks are principally directed ; reason, whose peculiar action is thereby not in the least disturbed, only impeded, does not thus *feel the space for extending itself closed*, and can never be wholly diverted from its attempts, *although it is hit here and there*. For

it *arms itself* for resistance against attacks, and thereupon *carries its head still so much the higher*, for the purpose of establishing its claims. But a complete estimate of its whole faculty, and the thence arising conviction of the certainty of a small possession, amidst *the vanity of higher pretensions*, does away with all litigation, and engages it to be satisfied with a limited but indisputable property." Only reflect on this as a passage in an author who is avowedly engaged in pouring new light on the philosophy of mind! A more complete personification of reason was never exhibited, even by his successors, and it is obvious that the passage could not possibly have been written by any one who, instead of speaking about a faculty, had concerned himself with the consideration of reasoning as a process. We here learn that reason *feels*, that it is susceptible of being *hit*, that it *arms itself* against attack, *carries its head high* for the purpose of establishing its claims, and is finally satisfied with a limited property amidst the vanity of higher pretensions; not to specify sundry other doings and attributes characteristic of an independent agent. These are, it must be allowed on all hands, highly figurative expressions; but who can tell us what are the real facts meant to be indicated by them? A sharp sight may possibly detect a faint glimmer of meaning in several of the figures, but there can be little hesitation in pronouncing the facts in the

main to be as imaginary as the dress which they wear is imaginative. Such writing bears about the same relation to true mental science, as the Loves of the Triangles to the demonstrations of Euclid: —

“ Alas ! that partial science should approve  
The sly rectangle's too licentious love !  
For three bright nymphs the wily wizard burns ;—  
Three bright eyed nymphs requite his flame by turns.”

It is doing no injustice to Cousin to say that similar remarks are applicable to him. Let us take a specimen of his speculations in proof. “It is reason,” he says, “which perceives both itself and the sensibility which envelopes it, and the will which it obliges without constraining.”

Now here we have divers imaginary facts. If the reason which hovers about M. Cousin (for the faculty being, as he affirms, impersonal, cannot belong to him or reside within him) really perceives itself, I can only say in my own case that I am not conscious or in any way cognisant of a separate entity called reason, making itself the object of its own observation ; nor am I conscious of, or even able to understand, such a phenomenon as sensibility enveloping reason ; and I am as little conscious that reason performs the difficult, if not impossible, task of obliging without constraining another power named the will. As they are stated by M. Cousin, all these are the imaginary transactions of imagi-

nary entities, and vanish the moment you try to substitute operations for faculties. Had the sentence here quoted proceeded from an English pen, it would have been at once stigmatised as jargon; nor can I pass a more favourable judgment on such phrases as—"I myself am the instrument with which I know everything:" "c'est moi qui suis l'instrument avec lequel je connois toute chose."\*

When, again, he speaks of the *will* being "*the centre of consciousness, and reason its light*," I am incapable of finding any state of mind in myself answering to these plausible expressions.

It is anything but satisfactory to know that some of our English philosophers have fallen into similar nullities; as, for example, Dr. Reid, in a passage before quoted, where speaking of mankind's irresistible belief in an external world, he says, "if Reason should stomach and fret ever so much at this yoke, she cannot throw it off: if she will not be the servant of Common Sense, she must be her slave."

The prevalence of such imaginary facts in metaphysical writings, indicates that mankind have arrived at about the same stage in mental philosophy as they had in physical science when they talked of the transmutation of the metals, the elixir of life, the influence of the stars on human destiny, the existence of positive levity, nature's horror of a vacuum, and the like.

\* *Fragmens Philosophiques.*

I have already explained the effect of figurative language in misleading us into false conclusions; and this is equally the effect of chimerical facts, whether dressed in a plain or metaphorical garb.

But where they are harmless in this respect,—if such innocuousness is possible,—they all produce, like the physical errors I have named, another and scarcely less extensive evil; they obstruct the progress of science by a false semblance of having solved some proposed question or problem; by which fallacious solution mankind—prone to accept any plausible explanation of their difficulties—are for a time satisfied, and the spirit of inquiry among them is lulled to sleep.

Nor is this all.

The mode of dealing with the subject on which I have here animadverted is especially calculated in these days to banish the philosophy of mind from the attention of all men of sense and science; and thus tends, by different but concurrent means, to keep it at the comparatively low point at which it now stands.

No one, after reading the extracts I have presented to you in the two or three preceding letters, can be surprised to hear of a declaration made by men of eminent abilities, that, after years of study, they had not succeeded in gathering one clear idea from the speculations of Kant. I should have been almost surprised if they had.\* “I am endeavour-

\* “In or about 1818 or 1819, Lord Grenville, when visiting the lakes of England, observed to Professor Wilson, that,

ing," exclaims Sir James Mackintosh, in the irritation evidently of baffled efforts, "to understand this accursed German Philosophy."

Neither can one greatly wonder that a recent philosopher of high reputation, M. Comte, has attempted to discredit the whole subject, asserting that the pretended direct contemplation of the mind by itself, is a pure illusion. On this point, as I utterly dissent from him, I shall probably have something to say hereafter.

after five years' study of this philosophy [Kant's], he had not gathered from it one clear idea. Wilberforce, about the same time, made the same confession to another friend of my own."—*De Quincey, in Tail's Magazine, June, 1836.*

## LETTER VI.

## CLASSIFICATION OF THE PHENOMENA OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

IF, according to my representation, the mental powers and capacities of man are to be considered as only classified operations, or states of consciousness, you will probably be disposed to ask, what is the classification that I myself adopt?

This is a very reasonable inquiry, which I will endeavour to satisfy; and, indeed, the very course of the exposition I have undertaken requires me to attempt it. But I must remark, at the outset, that classification in this department of knowledge, as in many others, is to a certain extent arbitrary, and that in the present case some of the operations necessarily include or presuppose others. My aim will be to present such an arrangement as, if not complete in itself, will be correct as far as it goes, and will, at all events, enable me to explain with clearness and in definite language, those views of the human mind which I have to unfold.

Hume has well described the task before me, its advantages and its difficulties; although, in saying so, I would not be understood as concurring in



every position he lays down, or every expression he employs.

“It is remarkable,” he says, “concerning the operations of the mind, that, though most intimately present to us, yet, whenever they become the object of reflection, they seem involved in obscurity; nor can the eye readily find those lines and boundaries which discriminate and distinguish them. The objects are too fine to remain long in the same aspect or situation; and must be apprehended in an instant by a superior penetration, derived from nature, and improved by habit and reflection. It becomes, therefore, no inconsiderable part of science, barely to know the different operations of the mind, to separate them from each other, to class them under their proper heads, and to correct all that seeming disorder in which they lie involved, when made the object of reflection and inquiry. This task of ordering and distinguishing, which has no merit when performed with regard to external bodies, the objects of our senses, rises in its value when directed towards the operations of the mind, in proportion to the difficulty and labour which we meet with in performing it. And if we can go no further than this mental geography, or delineation of the distinct parts and powers of the mind, it is at least a satisfaction to go so far; and the more obvious this science may appear (and it is by no means obvious), the more contemptible still must

the ignorance of it be esteemed, in all pretenders to learning and philosophy.\*

Without further preamble, I will present you with my arrangement, and, for the sake of clearness and easy reference, I will draw it up in the form adopted by naturalists.

## CLASS. THE PHENOMENA OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

### ORDER 1. SENSITIVE AFFECTIONS.

*Genus 1. Bodily Sensations.* Sensations in the bodily organisation, not attended by, or not comprising, the perceiving of any thing external to the body.

*Genus 2. Mental Emotions.* Emotions without consciousness of any affection of the bodily organisation, or of anything external.

### ORDER 2. INTELLECTUAL OPERATIONS.

#### *Genus 1. Discerning.*

Species 1. Discerning through the Organs of the Senses, or Perceiving.

Species 2. Discerning in all other cases, *i. e.* when the Organs of the Senses are not concerned.

#### *Genus 2. Having ideas or mental representations, or Conceiving.*

Species 1. Conceiving without individual recognition.

Species 2. Remembering, or conceiving with individual recognition.

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\* Inquiry concerning the Human Understanding. Sect. 1.

Species 3. Imagining, or having representations in a different order or combination from any in which the originals were discerned.

*Genus 3. Believing.*

- Species 1. Believing on evidence.
- 2. Believing without evidence.

*Genus 4. Reasoning.*

- Species 1. Contingent Reasoning.
- 2. Demonstrative Reasoning.

ORDER 3. WILLING.

- Genus 1. Willing movements of the body.*
- 2. *Willing operations of the mind.*

I shall immediately show that this classification may be in some respects altered without much, if any, material disadvantage, and I shall afterwards proceed to explain several parts of it which may not at first sight be properly appreciated. I may also remark, that should you or any one else object to the introduction of the terms, class, order, genus, species, these, not being at all essential, may be dispensed with, and the whole arrangement thrown into the form of a simple synoptical table, with the usual modes of separation and ramification.

At the same time, I must confess that, in my judgment, the adoption of the forms used in natural history brings the related operations more distinctly into view, — a point much neglected in many of our popular treatises, in which the faculties are delineated and explained in separate chapters, with

little indication of any connection subsisting amongst the processes described under each head.

Whether you will be able to concur with me or not in the classification I have adopted, is a point, I would observe, not very material to the principal questions which I am about to discuss. They are quite independent of any such arrangement, and it will be sufficient for my design if I succeed in making perfectly clear the acceptations of the various terms contained in it.

I have already mentioned that a different classification might be adopted. As one variety, I give you the following, which comes nearer to the classification of some of my predecessors:—

#### CLASS. THE PHENOMENA OF CONSCIOUSNESS.

##### ORDER 1. EXTERNAL OPERATIONS AND AFFECTIONS.

- Genus 1. Perceiving through the Organs of Sense.*  
 2. *Bodily Sensations.*

##### ORDER 2. INTERNAL OPERATIONS AND AFFECTIONS.

*Genus 1. Conceiving.*

- Species 1. Conceiving without individual recognition.  
 Species 2. Remembering, or conceiving with individual recognition.  
 Species 3. Imagining, or conceiving in a varied order.

*Genus 2. Discerning.*

3. *Believing.*  
 Species 1. Believing on evidence.  
 2. Believing without evidence.

*Genus 4. Reasoning.*

1. Contingent reasoning.
2. Demonstrative reasoning.

*Genus 5. Emotions.*6. *Willing.*

- Species
1. Willing movements of the body.
  2. Willing operations of the mind.

This arrangement may possibly be regarded as the better of the two. My own taste, or rather judgment,—without attaching much importance to the matter,—decidedly, however, prefers the other; in elucidation of which I shall proceed to offer you a few brief comments in my two or three ensuing letters.

## LETTER VII.

## SENSITIVE AFFECTIONS.

It will be observed that I have placed together in the first order bodily and mental feelings, which I have done because they agree in being *sensitive* affections as contradistinguished from intellectual operations.

An objection may be reasonably made to the terms bodily and mental being thus put in opposition to each other, inasmuch as all feelings are mental, *i. e.* are modes of consciousness; but I have found it impossible to avoid such language (and the same may be said in reference to the epithets external and internal), without either great circumlocution, or resorting to crabbed and repulsive terminology. Bodily sensations in my nomenclature are such as are really felt to be in some part of the body.

You will probably notice with surprise that acts of perception through the organs of the senses are not only separated from bodily sensations, but ranked under the head of intellectual operations; while bodily sensations themselves are placed under the same order as emotions. This point is perhaps the most difficult to deal with in the whole classi-

fication, and requires to be elucidated at some length. My separation of the two kinds of mental phenomena in question is founded on certain facts of consciousness, to which I must beg your especial attention.

1. We have, in the first place, a great variety of sensations which we feel to be in some definite part of the body without perceiving anything external to the organisation. Of this kind are sensations on the skin; as a glow on the cheeks, a prickling on any part of the surface, pulsations, hunger, thirst, morbid indications in the alimentary canal and elsewhere, and a hundred nameless feelings. They may be briefly described as sensations internal to the organisation, and localised, or felt to be in particular parts of it.

2. Through the organs of sense, we perceive objects to be external and different from ourselves, the percipient beings. We touch, see, hear, taste, and smell outward things.

3. We have emotions purely internal, which we feel to be wholly different, on the one hand from our intellectual states or movements, and on the other from our corporeal sensations. I scarcely need mention hope, joy, fear, sorrow, as instances of this kind.

From this brief glance at their respective characteristics, bodily sensation appears to differ so widely from the perception of external objects, that these two sorts of mental phenomena natu-

rally fall, in any arrangement, under different heads; and the former being a kind of feeling, while the latter is a species of discerning, they may be conveniently ranged under the orders to which I have respectively referred them.

On the other hand, bodily sensations and mental emotions are so far allied that they both come within the description of sensitive affections or feelings; and although they may be said to be generically different, these genera may be fairly and advantageously placed under one and the same higher denomination.

The question, however, arises, whether this arrangement would not separate the functions of some of the organs of the senses from those of others.

"We undoubtedly," it may be said, "perceive external objects by the sight and the touch; but is it equally clear that we are conscious of perceiving something external in the mental states of hearing, tasting, and smelling? Are not these more nearly allied to what have been just described as bodily sensations, than to intellectual operations; and are they not in fact internal to our organisation, and originally felt to be so?"

To this I reply, that, as far as I can determine the point from self-observation, we have a consciousness, or more properly a perception, of something external in the exercise of all our organs of sense; in hearing, and tasting, and smelling, as well as in touching and seeing.



The contrary opinion seems partly to arise from the external things perceived in the three last-mentioned cases, being *unextended*; or rather not being perceived to be extended, like the objects of sight and touch: but I think you will discern, on reflection, that there is no ground for limiting the term external object to a substance perceived to be extended. A sound is the object of hearing, a flavour of tasting, and a scent of smelling, as much as a rough or resisting body is an object of touch, or a coloured body of sight; and all these objects are alike perceived to be external, or in other words to be different from the being who perceives them.

This will be still more apparent, if you pause and reflect upon the last expression — that by external we in reality mean something different from ourselves; and surely no one ever feels that the warbling of a nightingale, or the burst of music from an orchestra, are part and parcel of himself, the percipient being. All the notes, from the lowest to the highest, in all their variety and rapidity of change; all the melody and harmony of the song, the concerto, or the overture, are perceived to be as external and independent of the hearer as the visible persons and instruments from which they proceed.

The apparent, or, as I should call it, the perceived externality of sound, is sometimes attributed to association with visible and tangible objects, but, I think, with manifest incorrectness; for, in that

case, hearing would be altogether an internal emotion, and I am myself unacquainted with any mode in which a state of consciousness, originally destitute of any reference to external things, can ever be converted into a consciousness of perceiving such things.

There are doubtless points of similarity between what I have called bodily sensations, and the perceptions we have through these three organs of sense. The functions of the organs of taste and smell resemble bodily sensations in being localised in the organisation, — whether originally, or, as I am inclined to think, from experience, *i. e.* from habitual conjunction with the operations of touch and sight, may be questioned: but so does the function of the organ of touch, which consists indisputably in perceiving external objects, while the function of hearing is, on the other hand, not necessarily felt as taking place in any particular part of the body, — resembling in this respect that of the sight.

From this you will observe that I do not regard the circumstance of some part of the bodily organisation being consciously affected as the characteristic distinction between bodily sensations and acts of perception. The distinction between the two is, that the former do not comprise a consciousness of the presence of anything external to the body, while the discernment of something external is the essential attribute of the latter.

It must not, moreover, be overlooked, that acts of

perception through the organs of hearing, tasting, and smelling, while they are concerned solely with unextended objects, are usually accompanied by pleasure or pain ; and these two circumstances combined tend perhaps, on a first view, to give them the character of bodily sensations.

Having thus explained the reasons for the first order in my arrangement — a business of unavoidably dry and minute distinction and detail — I will postpone the consideration of the second to another Letter.

## LETTER VIII.

INTELLECTUAL OPERATIONS. — DISCERNING AND  
CONCEIVING.

IN resuming the consideration of the second order in my proposed arrangement, I must first glance by the way at the fact already referred to, that most of the intellectual operations include and presuppose others. With the exception of perceiving, they can indeed, none of them, be considered as simple or uncombined.

Having representations or conceiving, implies having previously felt or perceived, or some other prior state of consciousness. Discerning, otherwise than through the organs of sense, includes conceiving: and reasoning includes both conceiving and discerning, and one species of it, believing.

In other words, although we may possibly *perceive* through the organs of sense, without any other conscious operation, we cannot *conceive* or have representations, without having previously perceived or felt what is thus represented to us; we cannot *discern* (when the organs of sense are not engaged) without *recalling* or *remembering* something on which our discernment is exercised; and we cannot *reason* without both remembering and

discerning, nor, in regard to contingent matters, without *imagining* and *believing* what we cannot know.

The operation which I have named discerning, and the reasons for so calling it, will require some explanation.

This term, it appears to me, or at least some equivalent general term, is needed to denote not only perception through the organs of sense, but all kinds of perception (if I may use the word for once in its most comprehensive acceptation), whether sensational or intellectual, external or internal, which are in fact frequently blended together.

This will be accomplished by adopting the term *discerning* as the name of the genus, and confining *perceiving* to that species of discernment which takes place through the organs of the senses. If this is done, we may use the word discern in the latter case, either with or without mention of the senses; but when we wish to be at once brief and precise, we shall have recourse to the word perceive.

It frequently happens that our knowledge of a complex fact is the joint result of perceiving and conceiving, or recollecting.

I may observe, for example, that a certain house is a square building, by looking at it on all sides; but I do not perceive it to be square at once by the actual exercise of sight. I walk round it, and look successively at each angle, every one of which I

find to be a right angle, but at the moment of making the last observation, I only *recollect* that the others are right angles. I cannot, therefore, be said to perceive actually by sight that the whole building is square: but if we use the word discern in the sense above-mentioned, the whole process will be embraced, by saying that I discern the house to be square. I learn that it is so by comparing the angle in sight with the angles previously seen — what I perceive with what I recall.

This point will perhaps be still better illustrated by the hypothetical case which follows.

Suppose I am invited to look at the portrait of an eminent statesman whose person was before unknown to me. He is himself standing beside the picture when I enter the room, and from seeing both together, I pronounce it to be an excellent likeness. On another occasion, I visit it with a friend of the statesman in the absence of the original, and my companion, who sees the picture for the first time, agrees with me in adjudging it to be a faithful representation.

In the first case I may be said, with perfect correctness, to perceive the resemblance, as the two objects compared are both in sight; in the second case, my companion cannot be said to perceive, but he may be said to *discern* it, inasmuch as, although he perceives the picture, he only recollects the person represented by it. He compares what he perceives with what he remembers, and the result

is a discernment of the likeness of one to the other. Such nicety of designation, which would be needless, and might appear affected in common discourse, is essential for the accurate description of intellectual processes, and for correct deductions from them.

I will add another illustration. In geometrical reasoning, if I have a diagram before me, I may say either that I perceive the equality of two angles, or that I discern it through the organ of sight, or, making use of the generic term, simply that I discern it; but if I dispense with a diagram, and only conceive the figure, I can no longer say that I perceive the two things to be mutually equal; I must, if I adopt the suggested phraseology, affirm that I discern them to be so; and yet, except in the single point that the sight is exercised in one and not in the other, the two processes are exactly the same.

Philosophers are now, I think, agreed that it is desirable to have a general term exclusively appropriated to designate our cognisance of objects through the organs of the senses; and the word perceiving or perception seems to have better claims to the office than any other.

At the same time, the operation of distinguishing in those cases in which the organs of sense are not in exercise, is often so exactly the same as when they are, and the two species of operation are so perpetually blended together, that it is equally desirable to have a form of expression which may

be applied in common to both ; and such a phrase we have in the generic term discerning.

A similar distinction, although in different language, and varying in some other respects, has been made by preceding writers, but it has seldom been rigorously adhered to. Harris, for example, divides perception into two kinds, sensitive and intellective, and if you wish to see how he treats them, you may consult his once celebrated "Inquiry concerning Universal Grammar." \*

Before concluding this part of my subject, it may be necessary to notice a common mode of speaking about perception (to which, indeed, I alluded in a former Letter), as if it were an inferior task performed by those drudges, the senses. The author last referred to may be cited in illustration : "When a truth is spoken," he says, "it is heard by our ears, and understood by our minds."

The philosophers who thus speak, evidently regard the senses, as acting indeed independently, but at the same time as only bringing objects before the understanding, which then proceeds to deal with them and subject them to its various processes ; while my view of man as a percipient and intelligent being, leads me to consider the act of perceiving through the organs of sense to be as truly an intellectual operation as any other.

\* See page 221. of the Works of James Harris, by his son, the Earl of Malmesbury.



With respect to the second genus in my second order, it may be necessary to say that I employ the phrase "having representations or conceiving," with the same, or nearly the same meaning (but a more restricted one), as logicians are accustomed to give to the term "simple apprehension." To conceive an object, to have an idea of it, to think of it, are, in my proposed nomenclature, identical expressions.

Mr. Dugald Stewart has furnished us with a definition in which I concur, except that it speaks of a faculty when I should speak of an operation, and is not sufficiently comprehensive. "By conception I mean," he says, "that power of the mind which enables it to form a notion of an absent object of perception, or of a sensation which it has formerly felt."\* I should add, "or of any other former state of mind."

Remembering is conceiving, with the addition of individually recognising the thing conceived. It has, in general, been treated separately from conceiving without recognition, but it is obviously only a kindred species.

\* This passage may be noted as a good instance, in addition to the many examples before adduced, of the tautology which results from the common method of talking about faculties instead of acts or operations. It speaks of conception as a *power* of the mind *enabling* it — i. e. a *power* of the mind giving it *the power* — to form a notion of an absent object; this cumbrous circumlocution meaning simply that forming a notion of an absent object is termed conception.

When a common name, for example, is used, such as the word *lady*, the image which comes into my mind is perhaps attended with no consciousness of my having seen a corresponding original. When, on the contrary, a proper name is used, as Queen Victoria, I have an idea of her personal appearance, with a consciousness of having seen her at some former time. It is obvious, however, that the two operations have so much in common, one being only something more than the other, that they readily fall under the same genus.

Similar remarks apply to the operation of imagining, a definition of which I may also borrow from Mr. Stewart, taking the same exception as before to some of the phraseology used.

After remarking that "the business of conception is to present us with an exact transcript of what we have felt or perceived," he proceeds: "But we have, moreover, a power of modifying our conceptions by combining the parts of different ones together, so as to form new wholes of our own creation. I shall employ the word *imagination* to express this power." \*

You will, perhaps, be surprised that, in my table, there is no place allotted to the Association of Ideas, a mental phenomenon which has made a great figure in numerous treatises.

My reason is, that I look upon that phrase as

\* Elements, vol. i. chap. 3.

indicating, not any separate operation of the mind, but the circumstances, as far as they can be assigned, which determine what we conceive, remember, and imagine.

All these last-named operations consisting in ideas or representations coming before the mind, there must of necessity be causes why certain ideas present themselves and not others; and the doctrine of association aims to point out the general circumstances or connections discoverable amongst the ideas or their prototypes, which determine the order in which the ideas accompany or succeed each other, such, *e. g.*, as resemblance or proximity in the objects.

But in all this there are no operations of the mind besides those just enumerated.

It cannot be said that we conceive, remember, and imagine, and have, in addition, a train or combination of associated ideas in our minds. When you think of the bright days of your boyhood, and a thousand animating and affecting incidents are awakened in your recollection; or when you fall into a delightful reverie, in which you picture to yourself visionary scenes of happiness, never, probably, to be realised; your mind is, so to speak, the theatre, in each case, of a procession of remembered and imagined objects and events, or (what is precisely the same) of a train of ideas, the place of every one of which is determined by certain causes; and although the whole of these causes

cannot be assigned, there are some of them which can.

It is just these assignable circumstances which constitute what are sometimes termed principles of association amongst ideas; but they might as truly be termed principles of memory and imagination, or causes that determine the order in which we remember and imagine. The phrases *having associated ideas* on the one hand, and *remembering* or *imagining* on the other, do not describe different phenomena.

It is curious, therefore, to find the association of ideas frequently treated as something distinct from conception, memory, and imagination.

These remarks are not intended to detract from the importance of investigating the general circumstances which determine the concomitance and succession of our ideas (for that is a most interesting part of philosophy), but to show the relation which the subject in question bears to the operations enumerated in my arrangement, and the reasons why association is not specified in it under a distinct head.

## LETTER IX.

INTELLECTUAL OPERATIONS CONTINUED.—BELIEVING  
AND REASONING.

I NEXT come to the operations of believing and reasoning, which, on grounds that will appear in the sequel, I treat together.

The word believing has been very variously and loosely employed. It is frequently used to denote states of consciousness which have already their separate and appropriate appellations. Thus it is sometimes said, "I believe in my own existence, and the existence of an external world, I believe in the facts of nature, the axioms of geometry, the affections of my own mind," as well as "I believe in the testimony of witnesses, or in the evidence of historical documents."

Setting aside this loose application of the term, I propose to confine it, 1st, to the effect, on the mind, of the premises in what is termed probable reasoning, or what I have named contingent reasoning—in a word, the premises in all reasoning but that which is demonstrative; and 2ndly, to the state of *holding true* when that state, far from

being the effect of any premises discerned by the mind, is dissociated from all evidence.

To you and others who have any acquaintance with a work I published some years ago on the Theory of Reasoning, it will not be new to be told that I there show how in every case of contingent reasoning, "the mind is determined to the belief of a fact not witnessed or known ; or, in other words, it infers an event or fact which it has not the means of immediately observing. For such inferences," I proceed to say, "one condition is always necessary. The reasoner must have been acquainted with a similar case or similar cases. We are determined to the belief of an unobserved fact by having observed or known a similar fact to have taken place in similar circumstances."

Thus the expressions "being determined by evidence to believe" and "drawing an inference," are in such cases equivalent, or rather they are different descriptions of the same fact ; one representing the effect produced by evidence on the mind to which it is exhibited ; the other speaking of the mind as passing from the premises to the resulting conclusion. Of these two representations the first is in my opinion the most philosophically exact.

But the question will naturally suggest itself to others as it did to me in arranging my table, "Although these two expressions are equivalent,

as denoting the same process regarded from different points of view, is the state of mind called believing always engendered in this way? are there not other cases in which belief exists where no evidence has been exhibited?"

To this inquiry the answer must be,—undoubtedly there are. Nothing is more common than believing without any evidence at all. Every man who has observed and reflected must be aware that propositions expressive of alleged facts are entertained with full conviction without the mind which entertains them having the slightest knowledge or recollection how it originally came to do so.

It may be disputed, indeed, whether the mental condition last described is entitled to the appellation of believing, the difference between being the result of evidence and the effect of chance or instillation standing out as very important; yet the two states are closely akin; and in familiar discourse they are not usually distinguished, but receive the same designation. A reason why the difference should not be considered as generic, may be found in the fact that it is not uncommon for a man to retain his belief in a conclusion after having forgotten the premises, and even that he ever had any premises before him. I have, therefore, placed these two mental states in the same genus.

If I had left out the second species from my table, I should have omitted a phenomenon of the

human mind which has played an important, and, in many respects, a lamentable part in the history of the world; and I know not that I could have placed it better than in the connection which the common voice has assigned to it. In truth, my only doubt is whether, in my anxiety to bring it into distinct view, I have not erred in making a separate species of it at all.

The reasons which have induced me to limit the word believing in my vocabulary to the acceptations now proposed, will be best explained by an examination of some of the modes in which it is frequently applied.

It is common to speak, for example, of believing in the existence of an external world. Sanctioned as this phraseology is by long custom, and by some of the most distinguished philosophers, I object to it because we have already more appropriate phrases in the word perceiving and its cognate terms. The expression, "I perceive an external object," while it is the simplest form of words we can find, means all that can be signified by the expression, "I believe in the existence of an external object," and, therefore, the latter is at any rate superfluous. But this is not all: such a use of the term belief unsettles that precise signification which this important word would have, if it were rigorously limited to the mental state of holding as true or probable what we cannot or do not directly know: and it also tends to weaken the import of "perception"



as expressive of an ultimate or rather a primary\* fact of consciousness.

On similar grounds I object to speaking of belief in the truths of geometry except in the case of those who take them on trust. The first premises in geometry are all simple facts which I discern; and I equally discern every fact in the subsequent deductions.

I do not, therefore, in any accurate sense, believe, I know or discern every truth in the process; and it is this discernment at every step, as I have shown in my "Theory," of the operation, which constitutes demonstrative reasoning.

To apply the phrase belief to such cases is substituting a comparatively weak and what, by the very process of so applying it, becomes a vague term for a stronger and a precise one.

There is another term nearly synonymous with the species of belief which is the result of evidence that ought in my opinion to be strictly limited to conclusions in contingent reasoning; I mean judgment.

By logicians it is employed to denote the act of mind expressed in a proposition.

But a proposition may express merely a perceived fact, as "gold is yellow," "the table is square," "the ground is hard;" or it may express

\* Primary in the order of occurrence, ultimate in the order of investigation.

a probable conclusion as "wheat is likely to rise in price;" or a demonstrated truth, as "the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal."

To use the term judgment in this way is diffusing its meaning into a generality worse than useless, making it comprehend the very different phenomena of facts perceived through the organs of sense, contingent conclusions, and demonstrated truths; some of which modes of applying the word would be certainly at variance with common usage as well as philosophically objectionable.

From these considerations I think it desirable to confine the word to the sense in which it is most familiarly employed, namely, that of a conclusion from probable premises. So limited, it would express the effect of evidence on the mind, or an inference in contingent reasoning; but it might with great advantage be separated from these synonyms, and appropriated chiefly if not exclusively to signify a particular class of conclusions, namely, those formed from *conflicting* evidence — the principal function of our courts of law.

There are cases continually happening, I scarcely need say, in which conclusions are drawn from facts all pointing the same way, and consentaneously determining our belief; while, on the contrary, there are others presenting discordant circumstances which require to be collated and compared, viewed and reviewed, and weighed with careful deliberation; and it is in these latter cases that the conclusion which results is most appropriately de-

nominated judgment. In our affluence of terms describing mental phenomena we may well spare it for this peculiar office. There is no need to apply it in any other way.

Although I must refer you for a full account of my views on reasoning to my theory before cited, I think it will not be superfluous to point out here, how the two very different processes of contingent and of demonstrative reasoning are wholly made up, so to speak, of operations already described.

In contingent reasoning, for instance, there is, first, perceiving the particular objects and qualities — the facts in a word — about which we reason; secondly, there is the conception or recollection of the facts so observed; thirdly, there is contemporaneously with these, the discernment of resemblance and difference in the facts; and, fourthly, there is the determination of the mind by the facts to the belief of an unobserved past, contemporary, or future event. Thus the whole process is composed of perceiving, conceiving, discerning, and believing.

In demonstrative reasoning there are the same operations of perceiving, conceiving, and discerning; but, instead of the complementary operation needful to complete the process, being the belief of an unobserved contingent event, it is the discernment of necessary coexisting facts or conditions. Thus there is nothing in reasoning but a combination of intellectual acts which are on other occasions separately performed.

## LETTER X.

## WILLING.

I NOW approach a very important and a very difficult part of my subject,—the operation of willing; which you will observe I have divided into two genera—willing movements of the body, and willing operations of the mind.

It is needless to describe what willing the movements of the body is. You have only to stretch forth your arm to appreciate it.

When we reflect upon the matter, it appears inexpressibly marvellous that by a simple wish we should be able to set in motion a combination of nerves and muscles, the existence of which we are entirely unconscious of, and to do it with such precision, that exactly what we wish is instantaneously accomplished. If this is wonderful in any case, it is especially so in the process of speaking. Rapidly as an orator may pour forth his words, every syllable uttered is the consequence of an act of willing, and all that is spoken is preceded and accompanied by acts of conceiving, recollecting, imagining, reasoning, and feeling; invariably by some of them, and frequently by all.

A similar rapidity of willing is exhibited in

playing on the violin or pianoforte, or other instruments; and both these cases—both uttering articulate sounds, and playing on musical instruments—often furnish striking instances of voluntary motions passing insensibly into automatic actions, in which willing seems to be superseded by what may be described with probability as the associated action of the nerves and muscles, unattended with consciousness.

On this point some valuable observations will be found in Dr. Hartley.

It would be here out of place to attempt, were the feat possible, to point out the innumerable bodily actions which we can will and perform

I have mentioned speaking, because not only is it one of the principal, but it has a very important reflex influence on our mental operations, both separately and in conjunction with its silent representative writing. Without these endowments, indeed, man would be as inefficient in speculation as a bird stripped of its wings would be helpless in the atmosphere.

The mere utterance of a thought, by giving it a more definite and distinct existence in our conception, enables us to recall it with greater exactness; and when we have, besides, attained the seemingly simple but all important accomplishment of putting down the words in written characters, the thought becomes associated both with a sound and a visible sign, and these with each other, the

whole frequently forming an indissoluble combination.

We have it *then* in our power to return with perfect certainty, as often as we find occasion, to the precise idea, or collection of ideas, which has previously passed through our minds ; and thus, in our progress in knowledge, we continually push forward the stations from which we set out on fresh acquisitions and new discoveries, without the necessity of always turning back to our original starting-place.

It is, however, to the second genus of willing that I am especially desirous of drawing your attention ; namely, willing, as exhibited in the direction and control of our other mental operations. This is a phenomenon much less easy to seize and describe than the other ; yet every one must be sensible that volition exercises some influence over his other mental states, or, in preciser language, that the conscious act called willing has often something to do with determining at the time what the other modifications of his consciousness shall be.

To ascertain and describe the precise character and extent of this control, is a nice and difficult task, particularly as whatever influence has place is almost inseparably and undistinguishably mingled with that of our voluntary bodily actions.

What I have to say on this interesting and highly important subject will be limited, at least for the present, to certain intellectual operations, in which

we can clearly and indisputably trace something intentional, and which may on that account be considered as compound; composed, namely, of discerning and willing.

In carrying out this design, several operations immediately come into view, which I may appear to have hitherto unaccountably overlooked. I allude particularly to attention, abstraction, comparison, classification, and generalisation. These I might have introduced into my Table as constituting a fourth order of mental phenomena, under the head of Mixed Intellectual and Voluntary Operations.\* Of the propriety of this, a short explanation will enable you to judge.

Attention, when not the result of strong feeling, as I shall hereafter notice, is only purposely directing our observation or thoughts to a particular subject. If the matter is external, we turn our bodily organs to it, and endeavour to discern all that is offered to our perception. If it is something in regard to which the organs of the senses are not in exercise, something conceived or felt, we purposely dwell upon it, and make it the sub-

\* ORDER 4. MIXED INTELLECTUAL AND VOLUNTARY OPERATIONS :—

- Genus* 1. *Attention.*  
 2. *Abstraction.*  
 3. *Comparison.*  
 4. *Classification.*  
 5. *Generalisation.*

ject of imagination or reasoning. In many cases, by strong efforts of volition, our attention is so concentrated upon what we are curious or interested to understand, that all other objects are overlooked.

To this extent our willing indisputably produces a directive effect on our intellectual states; but every one, I suppose, has experienced, like myself, the difficulty of concentrating the thoughts in this way without recourse to muscular efforts and external aids, particularly reading and writing and speaking. Without these or similar expedients, the direct influence which volition exercises over our intellectual movements is unsteady and comparatively inconsequential. The unaided mind seems continually wandering to extraneous subjects.

But we must not, as already intimated, regard attention as always voluntary. Some of the most remarkable instances of the mind being powerfully determined to the contemplation of particular subjects—instances of the most intense and concentrated attention—are involuntary; when, for example, we are labouring under violent passions, such as excessive fear, or hope, or grief, or joy. The man who is seized with vehement terror can attend to nothing but the object of the passion. His whole soul is absorbed—not only involuntarily, but even in direct and violent contrariety to his wishes—by the contemplation of what he dreads.



All emotions have a similar effect, proportioned to the degree of intensity in which they are experienced ; an effect, be it observed, that may be consentaneous with volition, but is frequently opposed to it.

Abstraction is nearly allied to the phenomenon just considered. It is, in fact, a species or form of attention, its negative aspect, so to speak.

Much as philosophers have written about this operation, it is really nothing more than leaving some things out of consideration and attending to others ; and this we may do on most occasions if we will to do it ; particularly with the aid of external instruments — pens and paper, figures and diagrams, and other material appliances.

Perhaps no better illustration of what abstraction is can be furnished than the practice of the accountant in casting-up columns of figures. When, for example, he is engaged with a column containing only three places, he first adds up the units, leaving the tens and hundreds out of consideration ; then the tens, leaving the units and hundreds unnoticed ; and, lastly, the hundreds, with a similar neglect of the other two.

Or take the geometer, who begins by puzzling the learner about such impossibilities as lines of length without either breadth or thickness, and points denuded of all dimensions ; the simple matter being that, in his reasonings about lines, he considers only length, and leaves breadth and

thickness out of account ; and in the case of points he leaves out all the three. In both cases, however, what he leaves out of account he cannot possibly leave out of conception.

And in all these instances you will not fail to observe the way in which any purely mental influence of willing is almost always intermixed with that of muscular actions co-operating to produce the desired result, and without which the effect of volition on the states or movements of the intellect would be inconsiderable.

On that sort of abstraction which, according to philosophers, results in the formation of those chimerical entities called abstract ideas, I purpose to offer some remarks in a subsequent Letter, when I shall have explained my views on the subject of mental representations.

In comparison, classification, and generalisation there is a similar desire to perform certain acts, or voluntary attention to certain things, and the voluntary employment of external aids. When two or more objects are presented to us, we necessarily, without any intentional effort, discern some of their resemblances or differences, or both ; but we often place them purposely before us to do this : and when we wish to mark the likeness between such objects, we call in the assistance of language by imposing the same name upon each of them.

This imposition of a common name on objects observed to be similar, completes and confirms the

process of classification, already less perfectly accomplished by discerning the resemblance, and is sometimes spoken of as one species of generalisation, which in truth it is.

Forming a general proposition with such common names is, however, the operation to which the latter designation is perhaps more usually applied, and which I intend by placing generalisation in my Table after and separately from classification. In both cases we discern resemblances, and, in consequence of this discernment specially directed upon them, objects and facts fall in our conception into groups, and, following a natural propensity, we purposely mark them by appellations which help us to think about them with greater facility and steadiness, as well as to indicate them on occasion to other persons with clearness and precision.

Attention, abstraction, comparison, classification, and generalisation thus usually, though not always or necessarily, imply the voluntary direction of the mind to certain matters and the aversion of it from others, with the assistance, ordinarily, of corporal acts and material appliances; or, in other words, they are intellectual movements, which may, and perhaps usually do, take place in consequence of our willing them to take place, and are aided in various ways by other voluntary actions.

But then the results of these intellectual movements are themselves independent of willing, as the results of all application of the mind or intel-

lectual movements once begun are. Perceiving, discerning, conceiving, recollecting, believing, reasoning, may all, on certain occasions, take their rise from voluntary efforts, and be aided by them; but what we then perceive, discern, conceive, recollect, believe, and infer, cannot be determined by such efforts, but must depend on the matters brought before us, including our own previous knowledge. We can perceive only what is submitted to our organs of sense; we can discern only such qualities as exist; we can conceive and recollect only what we have before perceived or been conscious of; and we can believe only what we have evidence for, or what has been impressed on our minds without evidence; and we can infer in our reasonings only those conclusions to which the premises in view determine us.

I might make similar observations *mutatis mutandis* in reference to our sensitive affections; but not professing in the present series of Letters to enter at any length on that order of mental phenomena, I must leave the application to your own sagacity.

I cannot conclude, however, without remarking that scarcely any attainment in the philosophy of mind is of greater importance than a clear view of the influence of willing over our intellectual and moral states of mind, and (what is implied in it) a clear view of the limitation of that influence. Some of the worst evils that have ever

afflicted humanity are traceable to enormous mistakes on this point; mistakes which still continue to prevail and do their work of mischief, even in the most civilised communities. But as I have dwelt largely on these topics in former treatises, well known to you at least if not to my other readers, I will now content myself with merely hinting the unappreciated importance of the subject, and commending it to general attention.

## LETTER XI.

THE ALLEGED FACULTIES OF REASON AND UNDER-  
STANDING.

I MUST not quit the classification of mental phenomena without adverting further to the principal instance of it — to the alleged master-faculty reason. This is universally spoken of in modes already noticed as a power distinct in some way or other from the man himself, as well as from all the other faculties of the human mind.

And it certainly has been strangely and whimsically treated. Sometimes it has been disparaged as poor, weak, fallible, fallen, degraded ; sometimes elevated into a sort of universal unembodied power, not human, not belonging personally to the man, something in a word divine : at other times it has been spoken of as an instrument, as a spring or source of moral sentiment, as a light, as a natural revelation.

If any one will take with him the explanation given in a former Letter, that all which the term can really denote is an intellectual operation or plurality of such operations,\*and will apply it to the passages in which the word is used in any of the

ways pointed out, he will find little difficulty in discerning what real meaning, if any, they contain.

It would be wearisome to enter into more than one or two of these illustrative cases.

Amongst other writers Mr. Dugald Stewart has been at some pains to lay down a precise definition of reason; and I should recommend you to read his chapter on the subject, were it only for the purpose of observing what vagueness and want of precise thinking even in an accomplished philosopher attends the method of dealing with faculties instead of operations.

He defines reason to be that power by which we distinguish truth from falsehood and right from wrong, and by which we are enabled to combine means for the attainment of particular ends.\*

Here we have certainly a curious assemblage of functions.

In the first place it is obvious that distinguishing the objects or qualities mentioned is not different from distinguishing objects and qualities of all kinds. We may, for instance, distinguish in propositions not only their being true or false, but their being positive or negative, general or particular, clear or obscure, pertinent or non-pertinent; and in actions, not only their being right, but their being prompt or vigorous, or graceful, or well-timed. If reason is to be confined to distinguishing

\* Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, vol. 2. chap. 1.

truth from error, and right from wrong, on what faculty is to be devolved the task of discriminating all these and a thousand other qualities from each other and from their contraries ?

On his own grounds this eloquent and accomplished philosopher must be allowed to be here at fault.

The second part of the definition is scarcely more felicitous than the first. Combining means for the attainment of ends is rather a complicated operation—usually including physical processes and acts of willing; but, in as far as it is intellectual, it is clearly only a particular case of contingent reasoning.

Having had experience of certain effects following certain causes, we infer that if we put like causes into operation we shall produce like effects : but we are continually drawing such inferences whether we ourselves put the causes into operation (in other words combine the means) or see them set in motion by other agency, or observe them spontaneously occurring. In each of those instances the mere act of reasoning is the same.

Thus Mr. Stewart, in his definition, presents only particular cases in which we distinguish qualities and draw conclusions, and reserves the designation of reason for the faculty by which, in his phrase, we perform the operations in these particular cases alone, to the arbitrary exclusion of precisely similar operations in all other cases.



It would be an analogous limitation were any one to confine the term memory to the recollection of what concerns human beings and their actions, excluding all other objects and movements, animate or inanimate, which we are equally in the habit of recalling.

It is, however, the renowned distinction of Kant between the reason and the understanding, which has attracted most attention amongst recent philosophers and which perhaps most strikingly illustrates the evil results of what may be called for shortness the method of faculties. In a former Letter I pointed out the curious imaginary actions which he describes reason as performing; and on further investigation we shall find, if I mistake not, much of what he says regarding this and the contrasted faculty, when brought into comparison, to be in the same strain. After we have carefully laid aside all alleged actions and transactions of which we are utterly unconscious, but which constitute the bulk of his description of the functions attributed to the two powers, we shall readily distinguish the portion of truth which underlies the whole.

In order that these functions may be conveniently compared, I will arrange some of the passages descriptive of them in opposite columns.

## THE REASON.

“Reason is the faculty which furnishes the *principles* of cognition *à priori*. Therefore pure reason is that which contains the principles of knowing something absolutely *à priori*.”—*The Critick of Pure Reason, English translation*, p. 20.

“We here distinguish reason from it [the understanding] by this, that we would term reason the *faculty of principles*.”  
p. 268.

“In cognitions which transcend the sensible world lie the investigations of our reason.” p. 7.

## THE UNDERSTANDING.

“The understanding being brought into action by objects which affect our senses and produce representations, compares, connects, or separates these; and in this way works up the rude matter of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects which is termed experience.” p. 3.

“The understanding is the faculty of thinking the object of sensible intuition.” p. 57.

“We explained in the first part of our transcendental logic the understanding as the faculty of rules.” p. 268.

“The understanding teaches us things in the field of phenomena.” p. 7.

THE REASON.

THE UNDERSTANDING.

"The conceptions of pure reason are transcendental ideas." *p.* 277.

"The pure conceptions of the understanding are the categories." *p.* 277.

"In our reason both [phenomena and noumena] are comprised together, and the question is, how does reason proceed to bound the understanding relatively to both fields?"

The sensible world contains merely phenomena which are not things in themselves, which (noumena) therefore the understanding must, because of its holding the objects of experience mere phenomena, assume.

*Prolegomena*, § 59.

*Prolegomena*, § 59.

These, in addition to my former quotations from the Critick of Pure Reason, will probably be considered as sufficient specimens of the distinctions drawn. It is not requisite that I should here repeat at length my objections to such phrases as "reason furnishing the principles of cognition *a priori*"; "reason containing the principles of knowing something absolutely *a priori*"; "cognitions transcending the sensible world"; "the understanding working up the rude matter of sensible impressions;" "the understanding teaching us things in the field of phenomena"; "reason bounding the

understanding" ; "the understanding holding phenomena and assuming *noumena* or things in themselves."

Expressions of this kind, as I have before pointed out in similar instances, either assert imaginary events — things of which we are not conscious,— or disguise real events in obscure and circuitous language, for which it is difficult to find a meaning.

It will not be hazarding a great deal to say that so much as is here and in other passages of the same writer ascribed of an actual character to Reason, amounts to this, that we are so constituted as to be able to discern necessarily co-existing facts, and to follow out trains of deduction in which such facts are progressively developed; that we are capable, in a word, of demonstrative reasoning.

What, on the other hand, is ascribed to the Understanding consists in discerning differences and resemblances amongst external phenomena, in forming general propositions accordingly, and in deducing from the phenomena observed other similar phenomena beyond our actual cognisance; which operations are simply comparisons, classifications, generalisations, and what are usually termed probable inferences.

Thus, the distinction between Reason and Understanding as presented by Kant resolves itself, as to everything essential, into the difference between demonstrative and contingent reasoning, as already explained in a preceding Letter.

This view is corroborated by the underquoted passage from Coleridge, who was fond of dwelling on the distinction; and in various works has lavished upon it expositions and illustrations which tend to complicate a subject in itself sufficiently simple.

On account of the prolixity of the passage, which you will excuse for the sake of its appropriateness, I must relegate it to the position of a note.\* It is

\* "Every man must feel," he says, "that though he may not be exerting different faculties, he is exerting his faculties in a different way, when in one instance he begins with some one self-evident truth (that the radii of a circle, for instance, are all equal), and in consequence of this being true sees at once without any actual experience, that some other thing must be true likewise, and that this being true, some *third* thing must be equally true, and so on till he comes, we will say, to the properties of the lever considered as the spoke of a circle; which is capable of having all its marvellous powers demonstrated even to a savage who had never seen a lever, and without supposing any other previous knowledge in his mind but this one, that there is a conceivable figure, all possible lines from the middle to the circumference of which are of the same length: or, when, in the second instance, he brings together the facts of experience, each of which has its own separate value, neither increased nor diminished by the truth of any other fact which may have preceded it; and making these several facts bear upon some particular project, and finding some in favour of it, and some against it, determines for or against the project, according as one or the other class of facts preponderate: as, for instance, whether it would be better to plant a particular spot of ground with larch, or with Scotch fir, or with oak in preference to either. Surely every man will acknowledge, that his mind was very differently employed in the first case from what it was in the second; and all men have

not without value as clearly explaining an important distinction, although some of the expressions are exceptionable.

To this resolution of reason and understanding, as set forth in the writings of some preceding philosophers, into the operations of demonstrative and contingent reasoning, I will add a few words on the strange metaphysical crotchet which asserts the impersonality of Reason. If, giving up the misleading language about faculties, we confine ourselves to intellectual operations, the dogma of impersonality has no longer any ground to rest

agreed to call the results of the first class the truths of *science*, such as not only are true, but which it is impossible to conceive otherwise: while the results of the second class are called *facts* or things of *experience*: and as to these latter we must often content ourselves with the greater *probability*, that they are so, or so, rather than otherwise—nay, even when we have no doubt that they are so in the particular case, we never presume to assert that they must continue so always, and under all circumstances. On the contrary, our conclusions depend altogether on contingent *circumstances*. Now when the mind is employed, as in the first case mentioned, I call it *Reasoning* or the use of the pure Reason; but, in the second case, the *Understanding* or Prudence.”—*The Friend*, vol. i. p. 271.

On this passage I would remark, that on grounds for which I beg to send you again to my Theory already referred to, the process of inferring probable events is as much entitled in common speech to the name of reasoning, as is mathematical demonstration; nor can it be deprived of the designation without subverting the whole structure of language: and in regard to the word understanding, if it be retained at all in writings that aim at philosophical precision, it should be employed in Locke's acceptation to denote the whole compass of the intellectual operations of man.

upon, it necessarily vanishes with the faculty to which that attribute is ascribed. But, even on the theory of faculties, the doctrine cannot sustain itself. That a certain conclusion is come to, or a certain truth discerned, by every intelligent being who is cognisant of the premises or the facts, no more makes the faculty of drawing the conclusion or discerning the truth impersonal—*i. e.* alien from the individual who deduces the inference or exercises the discernment,—than the circumstance of every person with a nose smelling the fragrance of musk or lavender elevates that distinguished feature into an impersonal organ of sense, and removes it out of the category of private possessions.

Nor does the fact of the operations attributed to Reason being independent of volition (which is a great argument with M. Cousin) at all alter the case. It is a mere arbitrary if not an unmeaning assertion, that *the Will is alone the person—the ego*; and, consequently, proving a thing to be involuntary does not prove it to be impersonal. An act of discerning, a bodily pain, an emotion of joy, are all as independent of volition as a process of reasoning can be; and should therefore, on the same ground, be excluded from being personal to the sensitive and intellectual being; who would then indeed be neither sensitive nor intellectual, but an automaton simply capable of voluntary action. All his feelings and intellectual acts would be felt and done by

something not himself, and consequently would *not* be his.

Further, I question whether any one can attach a clear positive meaning to the phrase impersonality of Reason. Were the faculty in any conceivable sense an impersonal entity, we certainly should have no means of becoming acquainted with it. We could not of course discern an intellectual faculty through the organs of sense, and we could not be internally conscious of a faculty not belonging to us. In what way, then, could it possibly come to our knowledge?



## LETTER XII.

### THE AMBIGUITY OF CERTAIN TERMS.

My present Epistle you will please to regard as forming a sort of parenthesis.

The view which I have taken in the preceding Letters of the operations and affections of the mind, if it have no other value, will enable me, as I before remarked, to speak of them with a considerable degree of precision.

With the same design of attaining and assisting others to attain precision of language, I purpose in my present Letter to call your attention to an important ambiguity, if I may so denominate it, to which some of the expressions employed both by myself and others in the designation and description of mental phenomena are liable.

What I allude to is well exemplified in the double use (almost unavoidable) of the term perception, and the occasional confusion and false inferences thence arising.

This is a species of relative term which designates what for want of a better name may be described as a double, or compound, or two-sided, but yet indivisible fact. Just as a leaf or piece of paper must

have two sides that may be separately viewed but cannot be disjoined, so there are some facts which consist of two parts equally inseparable in reality although distinguishable in description. Should this statement strike you as not very clear, a brief explanation may, I hope, elucidate it.

It is plain that there can be no perception without both a percipient being and an object perceived; and, conversely, there can be no object perceived without a percipient being. Both the act of the percipient being, and the object which he perceives, are expressed or implied in the word perception, forming essential and inseparable parts of its meaning; and this leads to the use of the term in two modes, according to the part or side of the phenomenon which happens to be principally contemplated at the time or is most prominently in view. When our attention is directed to the percipient being, we employ the term perception to denote his *act*, coupling it probably with the mention of the object, as, for instance, in the sentence, "his perception of the scene was momentary," in which connexion the word is equivalent to the active participle perceiving.

When our attention, on the other hand, is chiefly directed to the object perceived, we frequently designate the latter by the same term, particularly when the word is used with the indefinite article or in the plural number. We are constantly speaking of our "perceptions" when we intend simply

the objects perceived, as in the expression, "our recollections, or conceptions, are copies of our perceptions," meaning copies of what we have perceived, not of our acts of perceiving, although the latter are necessarily implied—copies, in fact, of external objects.

Now, although the term should in rigour be restricted to the act or state of the mind, yet it may, without inconsistency and confusion, be employed in this latter way to designate external objects in contraposition to recollections, or conceptions, or, as I should prefer calling them, representative ideas, or simply ideas.

But there are two other modes of using it, which are not equally harmless; one of them being self-inconsistent, and the other being confused.

The self-inconsistent mode is when in the same argument the word is employed first to denote the mental *act* and then the *objects* of the act, as in the reasoning that because perception is an operation purely mental, therefore, all our perceptions—meaning the objects perceived—are mental; or, putting the conclusion in still stronger language, therefore the objects perceived have no existence but in the mind.

The confused mode is when the term is employed so as really to imply (often undesignedly) something distinct on the one hand from the act of the percipient being, and on the other from the object perceived, as when it is said that our perceptions are like or unlike external objects.

Here the term cannot be applied to our acts of perceiving, for no one would think of affirming our acts of perceiving to be like or unlike the objects perceived; nor can it be applied to the objects perceived, for that would be pronouncing the said objects to be like or unlike themselves. What, then, is the phrase "perception" here intended to designate? It is not the act, it cannot be the object. Where, then, are we to look for the *tertium quid* which is to give to the proposition the reality or even the semblance of a meaning? Or how is it that such a comparison has ever been made, and such a resemblance or non-resemblance predicated?

In a subsequent Letter I shall find a fitting place for an attempt to solve the problem, leaving it in the mean time as an exercise for your metaphysical sagacity.

The acceptation of the word before us becomes still more unsteady with those philosophers who speak of faculties and powers. It is apt in their writings to have a triple meaning, in some places denoting the faculty of perception, in others the act of perceiving, and in others the objects perceived. And in addition to these acceptations I may mention the very objectionable practice of some writers (Hume for instance) who speak of perceptions when they mean conceptions or ideas\*, naturally, to be sure, on their theories.

\* "Nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception."—*Academical or Sceptical Philosophy*.

This remark leads me to notice that with the word *conception* there is not the same liability to error from ambiguity as with the word *perception*; or, to express myself more precisely, while the latter may be used, as just mentioned, in three senses, the former can be used only in two.

In a passage which I quoted in a former Letter, Dugald Stewart furnishes an instance in point. "The business of *conception*," he remarks, "is to present us with an exact transcript of what we have felt or perceived," meaning of course that it is the business of the *faculty* so called.

He adds: "But we have, moreover, a power of modifying *our conceptions*, by combining the parts of different ones together, so as to form new wholes of our own creation;" in which passage he manifestly intends to designate, not the faculty itself, but the transcripts which, according to him, it is the business of the faculty to present.

Thus we may speak of the faculty of conception, and of the products or acts of that faculty—conceptions; but there is not, as in the case of perception, a separate object which can be confounded with the act under one name. We do, indeed, speak of the objects conceived or recollected; but it is manifest that these objects, not being actually in presence, bear to the act of conceiving them a very different relation from that which objects actually perceived bear to the act of perception.

In strictness there is implied in the term conception nothing but the act itself; there must, indeed, have been previously an object discerned, but at the actual moment there is none: it is *then*, in itself, an absolute unconnected state of mind.

From this it follows that, although in the use of *perceptions* for objects perceived, we must be on our guard against confounding acts and objects in our inferences, against ascribing to one what is true only of the other, yet a similar caution is not required with the word *conceptions*, the employment of which can lead to no such confusion. As, nevertheless, when conception is not used to designate a faculty, it is equivalent to idea, and interchangeable with it, I consider the latter term, in virtue of its not being applicable to either faculty or object, to be preferable to the former, and shall accordingly make a freer use of it in the sequel; for, notwithstanding the loose and indeterminate manner in which it has been frequently employed, I think it may be easily limited to a perfectly definite acceptance.

There are other names designating operations of the mind, such as recollection, judgment, belief, cognition, to which some of the preceding remarks, *mutatis mutandis*, are applicable; but I need not trouble you with bringing them into consideration at present—they may possibly rise to the surface hereafter.

## LETTER XIII.

## THEORIES OF PERCEPTION.

IN glancing over my Table of mental operations and affections, you will perceive that there is ample room for comment and disquisition, besides the explanations I have already offered.

Agreeably, nevertheless, to what I said in my introductory Letter, that it was not my purpose to construct a system embracing an investigation of all the phenomena of mind, but to limit myself as much as possible to such of them as I thought I could elucidate by new considerations, or by putting old facts and arguments into a more definite and forcible shape,—I shall select for discussion, in the sequel, what may be regarded as the principal questions connected with the operations of perceiving and conceiving, without, however, excluding other topics that may incidentally arise.

Lest this should appear a rather narrow field to range in, I would call your attention to the fact, that I have in former works already treated at some length the important processes of believing and reasoning, and if I were to introduce them

here I should be only repeating what I have before advanced.

I may also remark, that the parts of mental philosophy which I have selected for particular consideration in the Letters which are to follow, embrace some of the profoundest problems that have ever been discussed.

After this preamble I proceed to the business before me.

It is singular, and at first sight unaccountable, how it should ever have been propounded, that in the act of perception, as, for example, in looking at a tree, there is an independent image, form, or phantasm, or idea of the tree interposed between the tree itself and the percipient being.

A man has only to look at any object before him, not contenting himself with words, to be satisfied of the non-existence of any such image or idea. To one of untutored and unperverted mind the very suggestion of such a thing would appear absurd. He perceives the external object, and, let him look as intently as he may, he can perceive nothing else.

Philosophers, however, were not content with simple facts, and a simple statement of these facts.

Amongst other conceits, divers of them appear to have entertained a notion that some such intervenient image or phantasm is requisite for the unmeaning reason, that the immaterial mind cannot come into contact with matter, or have any



communication with it, except, as several of these philosophers suppose, through a fine, filmy, shadowy, unsubstantial medium, overlooking that it is the business of philosophy at all times to take facts as they are, to regard what is done; not to perplex itself with hypothetical impossibilities. What mind can do, and what matter can do, must be determined by dry facts. The best proof of the practicability of a thing is, that it takes place.

They might have known, by merely opening their eyes, that intelligent beings *do* see material objects, and that in this simple act they are utterly unconscious of any image, species, idea, representation, or whatever else a metaphysician might choose to call that imaginary entity.

Even philosophers who did not consider any independent entity of this kind to exist, held the kindred doctrine, that there is a purely mental phenomenon, which is the immediate thing perceived, either constituting the object itself, or intervening in some inexplicable way between the external object and the percipient being, so as practically to prevent him from getting at the object, or to keep it aloof from him; an hypothesis, in whatever way it may be put or expressed, that embodies as rank a fiction as the other.

It seems to have been only after a thousand struggles that the simple truth was arrived at, which is not by any means yet universally received the truth that the perception of external things

through the organs of sense is a direct mental act or phenomenon of consciousness not susceptible of being resolved into anything else.

This notion that we do not perceive external objects themselves, but only the ideas of them, whether such ideas are to be regarded as modifications of consciousness, or as substantially distinct on the one hand from the percipient mind, and on the other from the external object, led philosophers into inevitable self-contradictions.

Locke, for example, in one part of his immortal Essay, is inconsistent enough to maintain that we perceive nothing but our own ideas, and yet that we have a knowledge of external objects, although he is evidently puzzled to explain how this can be. And well he might be puzzled. The doctrine which admits that we have a knowledge of external objects, yet at the same time maintains that we perceive only the ideas of such objects, not the objects themselves, is self-contradictory.

In order that we may be able to know what an idea is as a relative or representative phenomenon, we must know also what it relates to or represents, or, in other words, we must know also its correlative; just as to know what a son or a daughter is, we must know likewise what a parent is.

But if, according to the doctrine under review, we perceive only ideas, we are shut out from the possibility of knowing what the represented objects are; nay, even from the possibility of knowing that

such things as represented objects exist: no way is open by which the faintest suspicion of their existence could have access to us. We cannot, therefore, both know external objects, and yet perceive nothing but ideas. The two things are incompatible.

To escape from this contradiction, those who contend that we perceive only our own ideas, must admit that we have no knowledge of external objects: the term *idea* must be taken to denote something which is not relative or representative, something absolute or independent: it cannot signify a phenomenon or entity representing another phenomenon or entity called an external object. It becomes a positive term without reference to anything else, denoting the thing alone which is perceived: and thus all that the doctrine effects is the virtual re-introduction, under the name of ideas, of the things called external objects, ostensibly banished by it.

The whole is, in fact, however little it may be intended, a mere verbal quibble, stripping the word *idea* of its representative import, and then substituting it for external object, to which it thus becomes a bad, because an ambiguous, equivalent.

Locke, who was doubtless the last man in the world intentionally to quibble\*, braved the

\* In the opening of one of Mr. Stewart's Chapters, he is, however, plainly charged with this offence. The passage runs

inconsistency here pointed out, or rather was not adequately sensible of it. I have ventured to say that he puzzled himself on this particular matter, and I ought not to leave so heavy a charge against so distinguished a philosopher without the requisite proof; but as the evidence in support of it will occupy some space, I will reserve the subject for a separate letter.

as follows :—“ Mr. Locke’s quibbles founded on the word *innate* were early remarked by Lord Shaftesbury.”—Phil. Essays, p. 104.

## LETTER XIV.

THEORIES OF PERCEPTION. — LOCKE.

LOCKE's perplexity on the point adverted to in my last letter is remarkable.

After telling us that the mind perceives nothing but its own ideas; that it knows not things immediately, but only by the intervention of the ideas it has of them; and yet that there are external things with which some of these ideas agree; he proceeds to say, that ideas are to be distinguished as they are *in our minds*, and as they are *modifications of matter*. But here is at once a difficulty. For him to treat ideas as modifications of matter would obviously never do.

It appears to have immediately struck him that he could not consistently speak of ideas, as being in things themselves; he therefore requests when he so speaks, to be understood as meaning *qualities in the objects*\* (thus, by the way, virtually giving

\* How necessary this request on his part was may be seen in such passages as the following: — "That which produces any simple or complex idea we denote by the general name cause; and that which is produced, effect. Thus, finding that in that substance which we call wax, *fluidity, which is a simple idea that was not in it before*, is constantly produced by the application of a certain degree of heat, we call the simple idea

up his pre-declared doctrine). Proceeding then with his subject, we may, he says, *observe*, that primary qualities produce in us simple ideas, and that such ideas resemble the said primary qualities.

In the whole of this curious exposition he appears not to have been at all aware how constantly he is assuming that we have some method of knowing objects and their qualities independently of the ideas they engender in us, some other way than (as he expresses it) through the intervention of ideas to which he professedly restricts us: else how (let me ask) would it be possible for us, as he avers, to *observe* primary qualities producing in us simple ideas? and further (what still more glaringly implies a knowledge of both), that these qualities and ideas resemble each other?

Occasionally, however, as if he had some mis-giving as to our *observing* this resemblance, he modifies his expressions, and speaks in one place of our only *supposing* that ideas are taken from their archetypes.

Still he makes an attempt to explain the mode in which we come at the resemblance, and in pursuance of it he boldly puts the question, "How shall the mind, when it perceives nothing but its own ideas, know that they agree with things themselves? — a question, baffling enough on his own principles, which he answers not by indicating

of heat, in relation to fluidity in wax, the cause of it, and fluidity the effect."—Book 2. chap. 26.

another channel of information, but by arguing that since the mind cannot make to itself simple ideas, they must necessarily be the product of things operating on the mind in a natural way, and so carry with them all the conformity which is intended.

In this argument, it will be at once noted that his reasoning is, because ideas are not produced in one way, therefore they must of necessity be produced in the specific way he describes; which is plainly anything but a necessary consequence, as was afterwards shown by the speculations of Berkeley, who, in precisely the same case, discards "things operating on the mind in a natural way," and infers that ideas are imprinted by God.

That ideas are not made by the mind, might, if true, help us to the inference that they have some other origin, but not to any conclusion as to the character of their origin.

Without, however, insisting more on this *non sequitur*, and the easy way in which he slips in along with it "all the conformity intended," it is sufficient for me to point out that, in the argument commented upon, he takes for granted the fact of external things existing to operate on the mind; which fact, as I have already pointed out, he is debarred, as a logical consequence of his own doctrine, from either knowing or inferring; and he is of course equally debarred from knowing whether these, to him, imperceptible things, agree or disagree with ideas. Rigorously judged by his own

theory, he must be pronounced to be, in this passage, referring ideas to a source of which he cannot know the existence, and comparing them with entities impossible to be discovered or conceived.

In instituting such a comparison at all, he inevitably involves himself in self-contradiction; and the remark will apply to all other theorists who interpose any entity or any state or step of consciousness, under whatever name it may be couched, between the percipient being, and the external object. Whenever they make a comparison, or predicate a resemblance between such an entity (whether denominated idea or anything else) and an object, they expose themselves to the comment, that according to their system there can be no object to be compared: on their theory, they can know only one thing—what, in their own phraseology, is a representative phenomenon, although it can represent nothing.

But not only is it true that no comparison holds on any such theory as that of Locke's, but that no comparison holds on the contrary and correct doctrine of the direct perception of external objects. Yet how frequently do we hear it asserted by philosophers who maintain the latter, that "our perceptions are like external objects!"

It is only through a confusion of thought and language that a comparison of this sort can have been explicitly made or virtually implied, and the fallacy involved may probably be attributed to



that ambiguity adhering to certain terms which I formerly pointed out.

Putting out of sight one part of the compound fact of perceiving which includes both act and object, by calling the former, in some particular instance, *a perception*, and thus unconsciously transmuting, in their own imagination, the act into an independent entity, they obtain the *tertium quid* which I proposed as a problem in a foregoing Letter, and proceed to speak of a comparison between the imaginary entity so created and the external object; whereas there can evidently be no actual comparison instituted, because there is only one possible thing in view of the percipient being; there are not two things before the mind to be compared. In the case of having the perception of a tree, for example, or, in simpler language, seeing a tree, there is only one object, namely the tree seen. The other part of the process is the act of seeing by a spectator; and it is clear that this act or state called seeing the tree, cannot (without puerility at least) be compared with the tree itself: to speak technically, they are things disparate. You might as well bring into comparison the act of standing and the ground stood upon, and gravely raise the question whether they have or have not any resemblance to each other. Thus, on Locke's theory, consistently carried out, no comparison in the case of the tree is possible, because there is in view of the mind only *an idea*: on the true doctrine of

direct perception, none is possible, because there is only *an object*.

It is scarcely needful to remark, that the same observations which apply to the asserted comparison and resemblance between perceptions and primary qualities equally show the futility of any comparison between perceptions and secondary qualities.

Although there can thus be no comparison rationally instituted, and no resemblance predicated, between the mental act of perceiving and the external object perceived, between seeing the tree and the tree itself; or, as it is more loosely expressed, between the perception and the object; yet there *is* a comparison to be made and a resemblance discerned between another mental act or phenomenon and the external object. My *idea* of the tree when I no longer see it, must necessarily resemble the tree: the former must bear the same relation of similitude to the latter that a portrait bears to the original. In so far as it does not, it is not an idea of the object; to that extent it is not a copy, but a mis-copy.

The only legitimate question, then, that can arise as to the resemblance of what is internal to what is external is, whether *ideas*, in their proper sense, are like *objects*; and this answers itself, inasmuch as the very meaning of idea (indisputably in this connection at least) is the mental representation of an object formerly perceived.

The case before us signally shows the necessity of rigorously distinguishing in thought and language between the acts or states of *perceiving* and of *conceiving*.

The gratuitous assumption or groundless statement of Locke's, that we perceive nothing but our own ideas, would never have been made, nor the fallacies flowing from it committed, had it not been for the fundamental error in the method of treating his subject which pervades his profound Essay, and which may be succinctly described to be, not keeping distinct, in thought and language, the two essentially different operations of perceiving and conceiving; and, as a part of this error, not appropriating certain terms, such as representations and ideas, exclusively to acts of conception in the absence of the objects.

With him all these terms are professedly synonymous, and indiscriminately employed.

"Having ideas and perception," he says, in one place, "are the same thing." In another, "Whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call idea."

Hobbes, and others before him, had shown a similar want of discrimination.

Hence it is no wonder that, as a comparison may be made and a resemblance predicated between ideas in their proper or restricted sense and external objects, these processes should be extended

to any other of the heterogeneous phenomena ranked by the Essay on Human Understanding under the same denomination.

If instead of this verbal generalisation, or rather metaphysical jumble, Locke had steadily and consistently appropriated some term to denote discerning objects through the organs of the senses (*e. g.* the word perceiving), and had kept it uniformly distinct from any terms employed to designate conceiving objects in their absence (*e. g.* having ideas or representations), his great work, admirable in the main for its sound sense, largeness of view, and profound thought, would have been exempt from some of its weakest passages, and amongst the rest from much of the perplexed speculation which I have just pointed out.\*

Whether the terms here suggested are the best that could be chosen for the purpose of this discrimination, is open to question; but that some separate appellations should be employed to accomplish the same end, and should be rigorously adhered to, very few metaphysicians will probably doubt.

A similar confusion to that here pointed out pervades German philosophy, as far as I have examined it.

In his doctrine respecting the perception of

\* He would never, for example, have talked of the simple *idea of fluidity*, which was not in the wax before, being constantly produced in it by the application of heat.

ideas our great English philosopher is in the main followed by Kant, and divers of his countrymen, as I purpose to show hereafter. It is sufficient to mention here their unhesitating and gratuitous assertion that all which we perceive are representations, and that we can never attain to the knowledge of real objects; in the statement of which doctrine it is to be lamented that the English writers who adopt it pervert the excellent word representation from its legitimate meaning, and make it bear the weight of a false assumption. But before entering on the consideration of these philosophical aberrations, I must turn my attention to the prior subtleties of Berkeley, whose theory on this subject is by far the most celebrated of all. In explaining it, as in almost all his speculations, he exhibits a strange mixture of hasty inconsideration in laying down his premises, with great acumen and specious adroitness in drawing his conclusions. He is excelled by few in the art of erecting ingenious and imposing structures on sandy foundations.

## LETTER XV.

## THEORIES OF PERCEPTION. — BERKELEY.

BERKELEY, in his celebrated speculations on this subject, differs from the doctrine of Locke, animadverted upon in my last letter, since, while he concurs with it in asserting that we perceive nothing but ideas, he maintains that there are no external objects at the back (so to speak) of the ideas: in other words, he regards these ideas as in no way representing independent material entities, but being themselves all that we discern and all that actually have place or exist; and he thus avoids the inconsistency I have pointed out in his illustrious predecessor.

But this, so far, is, as I have already said, merely substituting the name idea for external objects, and really leaves the question in its original state with the disadvantage of exchanging a precise for what becomes after such a process an ambiguous term.

Berkeley, however, overlooked or was blind to this — for which oversight he had in truth abundant precedents — and went on speculating as if he thought that by giving to objects the name of

ideas (a term applied both by himself and others to purely mental phenomena of a representative character) he transmuted the first into the second; that by marking both with the same sign he effected an identification of nature in the things signified.

Quietly assuming this complete identity of nature, he proceeds very logically to argue that objects being ideas and ideas being mental phenomena, they cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them, nor have any existence when not perceived—a conclusion perfectly just in substance, although objectionable in expression, if the term idea is taken in its purely representative meaning, but false if that term is taken as including or signifying objects.

In the last chapter of my Theory of Reasoning I have pointed out how frequently the doctrines of philosophers owe their extravagant results to some error in the very outset of their speculations, and that this is exemplified in Berkeley's specious but utterly unsound theory of vision. It is no less exemplified in his doctrine on the present subject. The stumble from which he never recovers is made in the first sentence of his "Treatise on Human Knowledge." "It is evident," he says, "to any one who takes a survey of the *objects* of human knowledge that they are either *ideas* actually imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and opera-

tions of the mind; or lastly, ideas formed by the help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways." Never surely were phenomena requiring to be nicely discriminated so unscientifically jumbled together in the compass of one short sentence.

1. He calls objects perceived through our organs of sense "ideas imprinted on the senses" — an alleged operation which I reserve for future comment; thus at once assuming the identity of external objects and ideas, or rather getting quit of all that is peculiar in the former by giving them a name applied to other essentially distinct phenomena of a purely mental character.

2. He speaks of the passions and operations of the mind as *ideas* perceived by attending to them, which is another instance of the confusion of things and perversion of language, inasmuch as although they are mental phenomena, and subsequently give rise to ideas, they are not ideas, but simply what he begins by calling them — passions and operations of the mind.

3. He proceeds to designate by the same term what in my view should alone be designated by it, or have some other distinctive appellation, namely, representative ideas, or such as are formed (to use his own words) "by help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the afore-



said ways." Thus following in the footsteps of Locke, he confounds under the common name of ideas the objects which we originally perceive, and also the mental states of which we are originally conscious, with the recollections or representative conceptions of what we formerly perceived, and what we were formerly conscious of.

Mark his language in another passage : —

"It is an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible *objects*, have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But with how great an assurance and acquiescence soever this principle may be entertained in the world ; yet whoever shall find in his heart to call it in question, may, if I mistake not, perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction. For what are the forementioned *objects* but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own *ideas* and *sensations* ; and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these, or any combination of them, should exist unperceived ?"

Here he first presents objects to our notice — houses, and mountains, and rivers ; but as it would scarcely do to ask whether it is not plainly repugnant that these *objects* should exist unperceived, he adroitly substitutes the term *ideas*, thus giving his question the only plausibility it possesses.

He could scarcely expect (at least so early in

the discussion) his readers to concur with him in discerning any plain contradiction or repugnance in the unperceived existence of a mountain: he felt that he must first turn the mountain into an idea.

His whole theory is thus manifestly founded on the fallacy of imposing the name idea on objects perceived through the organs of sense, and then treating them as if a change of name were a change of nature, thus tacitly assuming at the outset the very point which he ought to have applied himself to prove, the only point indeed which he had to prove, the conclusion which should have been the result of his whole argument. If any one choose to indulge in the oddity of calling objects by the name of ideas, he should distinguish ideas into two classes, representative and non-representative, and, however the innovation might be objected to on the score of convenience and taste, it would, if consistently kept in view, lead to no false theories. But it is not allowable to confound the two essentially distinct things under one appellation and then forthwith to draw conclusions with regard to what, if termed ideas at all, ought to be termed non-representative ideas, which are true only of representative ideas.

It is just this fallacy of confusion into which Berkeley fell, and which underlies his theory. Although himself obliged in the course of his speculations to make a similar distinction amongst ideas, he con-

founded them together in his inferences: *i. e.* he drew inferences respecting one kind of the ideas in his nomenclature which could be correctly drawn only of the other. "The ideas," he says, "imprinted on the senses by the Author of Nature are called *real things*; and those excited in the imagination, being less regular, vivid, and constant, *are more properly termed ideas or images of things*, which they copy and represent. But then our *sensations*, be they never so vivid and distinct, are nevertheless *ideas*; that is, they exist in the mind, or are perceived by it, as truly as the ideas of its own framing. The ideas of sense are allowed to have more reality in them; that is, to be more strong, orderly, and coherent, than the creatures of the mind. They are also less dependent on the spirit, or thinking substance which perceives them, in that they are excited by the will of another and more powerful spirit; yet *still they are ideas*; and certainly no idea, whether faint or strong, can exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it." \*

To any one who closely examines it, the course of argument in this passage, seriously as it is meant, really reaches the amusing, although in saying so I may be accused of attempting to "*vanquish Berkeley with a grin*."† The writer of it recognises, it will be observed, two distinct classes of ideas; the first class passing under the name of *real things*, and the second more properly, as he confesses,

\* Principles, sect. 33.

† Pope.

under that of *ideas*, being copies or representations of the first class: but still the first class, although called real things (an appellation which, it is to be noted, he dexterously softens into *sensations*), are ideas after all; and as the second, or representative ideas, are allowed on all hands to exist only in a perceiving mind, so must it be with the first. Who can doubt it, when they bear the same name?

But not only is this passage an amusing sample of sophistical ingenuity, adroitly assuming the very conclusion to be established, it furnishes us also with a notable instance of what I have described in a preceding Letter, — assigning imaginary facts in explanation of real phenomena. So long as Berkeley did not speculate on the question of source or cause, his designating objects by the name of ideas would amount merely to an eccentric and inconvenient peculiarity in nomenclature; but when he goes further than the fact of existence, and assigns an origin to the important class of ideas passing under the appellation of objects or real things, he gets inevitably into the region of fiction. He boldly assumes the direct agency of “a more powerful spirit,” and asserts that ideas of this class — these so-called real things — are imprinted on the senses of mankind by the Author of Nature.

But, in the first place, we have no evidence whatever, and certainly no perception, of the agency here ascribed to the Author of Nature in regard to ideas; the assertion is a mere, but very extrava-

gant, conjecture : and secondly, the process spoken of is itself wholly unknown to us. We are utterly unconscious of such an operation as ideas being imprinted on the senses at all: it is purely fictitious.\*

If the doctrine, moreover, were true, the Deity would obviously be at the command of any one who chose to open or shut his eyes; and many other consequences would be deducible, which the reverence due to the subject disinclines me from naming.

And mark the metaphysical result which would inevitably flow from admitting it. When he speaks of imprinting ideas on the senses, in what light does he intend the senses to be regarded? Clearly they can be nothing, on his system, but ideas; and thus his doctrine teaches that what we term external objects are only ideas imprinted on other ideas by the Author of Nature.

The strangeness, not to say absurdity, of the doctrine reaches its climax in the case of recollecting or conceiving objects formerly perceived, or of having in the mind what Berkeley himself denominates representations. This would be having *ideas*

\* Berkeley, in a subsequent stage of the discussion, when he saw it needful to soften or modify some preceding passages, says that, by "being imprinted on the senses," he means only that "the mind is affected from without, or by some being distinct from itself;" but he cannot be supposed by this to relinquish either the senses as the channel, or the direct agency of the Deity as the immediate cause.

of the *ideas* which had been imprinted on other *ideas*.

We shall find a similar intermixture of the fictitious or conjectural, if we trace the other attributes or characteristics of the Berkeleian idea as delineated by his own hand.

It is described by him in various, but not always consistent, terms.

To be perceived constitutes its very existence, or, as he himself expresses it, its *esse* is *percipi*\*: it is a distinct individual entity *in* the mind; for he tells us that it is not a mode or property *of* the mind, but it is *in* the mind that perceives it †: and by saying it is in the mind, he means, as he explains, that it is the immediate object of the understanding. ‡ Further, it is independent of the mind, and may become exterior to it §, and when it is not perceived by one mind, it is or may be perceived by another. || Moreover, it is a passive, inert, and unthinking being ‡, with a spiritual substratum.

You may, perhaps, suppose its existence to be very precarious, since that existence depends altogether on its being perceived: but this is provided against; for although it is continually quitting individual minds, it by no means ceases to exist; since even should it fail to have a domicile in yours, or

\* Works, vol. 1. p. 24. (3 vols. 8vo., Priestley, London, 1820.)

† p. 192.

‡ p. 208.

§ p. 183.

|| p. 184.

‡ Ibid. and p. 35.

mine, or any other created mind, it still exists in the mind of the Author of Nature.\* Hence, Berkeley's bold position, which has startled many a student, "that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth,—in a word, all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world,—have not any subsistence without a mind, that their being is to be perceived or known†," shrinks, on a close inspection, to a needless flourish of insecurity and precariousness to alarm the imagination, inasmuch as when they are not perceived by any created being (or to be sure whether they are or are not), they are perceived by the Omniscient Creator; and thus their permanent existence, as Berkeley himself indeed points out, is secure.

Such is a brief statement or sketch of the *Berkeleyan idea*. Without troubling you by pointing out particular instances, I will content myself with observing that, where the delineation at all differs from what can be said of an external object, it is imaginary or conjectural.

\* Vol. 1. p. 183.

† p. 26.

## LETTER XVI.

## THEORIES OF PERCEPTION, CONTINUED.—BERKELEY.

THE discussion, I fear, has already become wearisome, but for the full comprehension of Berkeley's theory, it is necessary to take into view, not only the relation in which it stands to the common opinion of men, but also his own account of that relation; the latter of which is by no means precise and luminous.

When he started on his wild metaphysical enterprise, he very justly considered himself as engaged in proving that mankind were involved in a strange error; that what they mistook for an external, material, independent world, was merely an ideal one, dependent on being perceived; that there was a radical difference between himself and them regarding it.

Accordingly, he at first describes them, in a passage before quoted, as being strangely pervaded with the opinion that mountains and rivers have a natural or real existence, distinct from their being perceived. In the progress of his speculations, however, he veers round, and claims the majority of his fellow-creatures—the vulgar—as concurring in their views with himself.



Thus, in answer to the charge of Hylas, that Philonous is for changing all things into ideas, he makes the latter say:—

“ You mistake me. I am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things; since those immediate objects of perception which, according to you, are only appearances of things, I take to be the real things themselves.”\*

The same speaker afterwards says:—“ We both, therefore, agree in this, that we perceive only sensible forms; but herein we differ, you will have them to be empty appearances, I real beings. In short, you do not trust your senses, I do.”

Again, he asks his opponent, “ Whether, the premises considered, it be not the wisest way to follow nature, trust your senses, and, laying aside all anxious thought about unknown natures and substances, admit, with the vulgar, those for real things which are perceived by the senses.”†

In all this, however, there is something scarcely ingenuous. It wears at least that appearance of disingenuousness which is frequently the result of being thoroughly possessed by some favourite theory.

The truth is, that Berkeley's ranging himself with the vulgar in opinion, contrary to his antecedent declarations, is in reference not to the great question “ whether there is an independent external world,” but to certain subordinate inquiries confined almost

\* Works, vol. 1. p. 201.

† p. 203.

altogether to philosophers, one of which is, whether, besides the qualities we perceive through our organs of sense, there is an occult *substratum*,—a problem about which the vulgar, I imagine, seldom concern themselves, and may be considered as virtually, or by implication, siding with him.

But, although a Berkeleian must deny a substratum of this kind, his antagonist, so far from being bound to maintain it, may consistently unite with him in the denial.

In the same way Berkeley claims the multitude for his supporters, when he is arguing against the opinion that what we perceive by the senses, are only images or copies of real things. But on this point, again, any one may agree with him (as I myself do), and still wholly dissent from his peculiar theory.

The tendency of claiming, in this manner, the concurrence of mankind at large, which he knew was only on minor points, without distinctly keeping the questions apart, was to engender confusion; although after all he is obliged, before he closes the discussion, to confess a radical difference between himself and others on the paramount question at issue.

“In common talk,” he says, “the objects of our senses are not termed *ideas* but *things*. Call them so still, provided you do not attribute to them any *absolute external existence*, and I shall never quarrel with you for a word.”

Now it is just this absolute external existence, which is firmly held by the vulgar, or, rather, which they never think of questioning. The "common talk" referred to implies it, and Berkeley, being cognisant of the fact, should not have attempted to range the multitude on his side.

"Well, then," you will be disposed to ask, "what, after all these distinctions and disputes, is really the difference, stated in plain, unequivocal language, between Berkeley and other philosophers, or, rather, between him and mankind in general? What is the great peculiarity in the system about which all this controversy is raised, on which he has lavished such inexhaustible ingenuity, and to which men still turn with bewildered understandings and perplexed looks?"

The difference between him and others may be stated, I think, in a few simple propositions.

1. He maintains that the objects we perceive (which he chooses to call ideas) are, equally with representative ideas, mental, or in the mind: other people maintain that they are non-mental, or out of the mind.
2. He maintains that these objects, being mental, do not, and cannot, exist unperceived: other people maintain, that the fact of objects (which they deny to be mental) being perceived or unperceived can make no difference to the existence of such objects.
3. He maintains that the Author of "Nature"

imprints these objects or ideas on the senses, or directly affects the mind with them: other people maintain, that objects are perceived when they are brought before the organs of sense in the natural order of events.

Now, the first of these positions is, as I have repeatedly said, a mere gratuitous assertion: the second is an inference from the first, and cannot, in its logical character, mount higher than its source: the third is of precisely the same nature as the other two. Thus the whole of that in which Berkeley differs from the rest of mankind is a tissue of groundless assumptions.

In the last page but one of his "Dialogues" there is a remarkable declaration, which sums up in a few words what he teaches, and more accurately describes, than some antecedent representations had done, the relation in which what he teaches stands to common opinion; while at the same time, it clearly exhibits the philosophical error which misled him into his subtle and sophistical speculations. It is in these respects a most valuable passage.

"I do not pretend," says Philonous, "to be a setter up of *new notions*. My endeavours tend only to unite and place in a clearer light that truth which was before shared between the vulgar and the philosophers: the former being of opinion that *those things they immediately perceive are the real things*; and the latter, that *the things immediately*

*perceived are ideas which exist only in the mind ;* which two notions, put together, do, in effect, constitute the substance of what I advance."

That is to say, "I maintain that I perceive real things, not images or representations of them ; but at the same time that these real things are only ideas, and ideas can exist only in the mind."

Here the original fallacy which gave rise to this maze of ingenious speculation stands out—the fallacy of calling real things by the name of ideas, and forthwith treating them as if they possessed the characteristics of purely mental phenomena. If Berkeley had kept with the vulgar, he would have been right. It was the erroneous dogma of the philosophers that threw him wrong, and seduced him into the attempt to reconcile propositions which must ever remain at variance.

The correct and simple doctrine on the subject, which Berkeley has done so much to perplex, lies in a nut-shell. We perceive external objects, and, so far from perceiving ideas, as in his incorrect and tautological phraseology\* Berkeley asserts, ideas in their proper sense are not at all concerned in perception.

Further, it is not what we perceive that is mental, but the act, or state, or affection of perceiving it ; two distinct things, which Berkeley

\* I call it tautological, because he himself says, "*to have an idea is all one as to perceive ;*" whence, to perceive an idea is to have an idea of an idea.

confounds. The act of perceiving can be only in the mind, or, in other words, done by a percipient being; but the object perceived through the organs of sense can exist only out of the mind, or distinct from the percipient being; nor can there be any reason to doubt that it exists when no percipient being is present to perceive it.

It surely does not require much reflection to see, although it has been marvellously overlooked, that the perception of external objects through the organs of sense cannot be consistently regarded as anything else than a primary mode of consciousness which is not to be resolved into any other, and beyond which it is impossible to push our inquiries. The truth of this perception, or, what is the same thing, the existence of external objects, is consequently not susceptible of either proof or disproof. For let us pause a moment and reflect what constitutes proof—what proof is. It is neither more nor less than some fact which causes us, or which is adduced for the purpose of causing us, to discern or to believe some other fact.

Now, a fact must be either external or internal, material or mental, relating to the world without or the world within. But an external fact cannot be adduced in proof that there are such things as external objects; for that would be alleging as evidence the very truth to be proved. Nor can it be adduced in disproof, for that would be affirming

the positive existence of a thing in order to disprove its existence.

But if an external fact cannot in this case be brought forward in proof or disproof, it is equally plain that a purely mental or internal fact cannot be adduced for either purpose.

The only mental or internal fact which can be mentioned as at all relating to the subject is, that we perceive external objects: but this cannot of course be alleged in proof of itself, or of its own truth; nor can it be brought without egregious absurdity in disproof of itself.

That there are external objects perceived by us is therefore a primary fact, which admits neither of being proved nor of being disproved, and it is amazing that philosophers of great depth and acuteness should have attempted to do either.

## LETTER XVII.

THEORIES OF PERCEPTION, CONTINUED.—BERKELEY,  
HUME, AND BROWN.

I HAVE not yet done with the ideal theory.

So transparent appears to me the assumption of the identical point to be proved, as I showed in my last Letter, that I cannot myself refrain from marvelling how this baseless theory should ever have been considered both by its supporters, and even by some of those who have dissented from it, as unanswerable.

Hume, for example, whose doctrine I purpose next to examine, as set forth in the work which he expressly desired might alone be regarded as containing his philosophical opinions, declares that Berkeley's arguments admit of no answer; adding, however, that they produce no conviction\*:—an impossible state of things. That they produce no conviction indicates not only that an answer may be found, but that the reason may be assigned why the arguments seem to be incontrovertible. If a philosopher in such a case appears irrefutable in argument, it

\* Essays and Treatises, vol. 2. note x.



is almost invariably because he has, by the substitution of one term for another, or by the identification of two different things, incorporated in his premises the truth of the very conclusion he is labouring to enforce. In this predicament Berkeley stands, as I have shown, or endeavoured to show; and seeing that he begins by begging the question, I cannot certainly deem him entitled to the praise of reasoning well in support of his thesis.

Much as his arguments have been extolled, whoever closely examines them will find that he does not adduce a single one (arguments in a circle excepted) to prove his fundamental position; but, having assumed it without proof, he is thenceforward occupied, partly in deducing conclusions from it, partly in explaining facts according to it, partly in contending with objections which nothing but his original assumption enables him to combat, partly in overturning doctrines not necessarily held in connexion with the absolute existence of an external world, and partly in attempting, by a retro-active process, to confirm the truth of the assumed proposition from its own consequences.

That in doing this he has shown great logical adroitness and fertility of invention, much metaphysical knowledge and acumen, a wide range of thought, and a fluent and felicitous style, I most cheerfully admit.

Without some such high qualities as these, indeed, his theory could never have met with the reception

which it obtained. What has rendered them of no effect in the establishment of truth, is the gratuitous and groundless assumption from which he so unconsciously sets out.

Hume's strong declaration as to the irrefutable character of Berkeley's arguments, whether with or without conviction of the position they were brought to prove, is the more extraordinary that, although he professedly favours Berkeley's theory, most of his expressions clearly imply Locke's untenable position already examined, which Berkeley explicitly rejects. After remarking that mankind in general "suppose the very images presented by the senses to be the external objects, and never entertain the suspicion that the one are nothing but representations of the other," Hume goes on to assert, "that no man who reflects ever doubted that the existences which we consider when we say, *this house*, and *that land*, are nothing but perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies or representations of other existences which remain uniform and independent." Here, in direct contradiction to Berkeley, he plainly admits the independent existence of external objects, although he maintains in the same breath that we perceive nothing but representations of them, and even speaks of such objects as remaining uniform and independent existences in contrast with their copies, which are fleeting.\* Yet he subsequently says, "The mind

\* Berkeley, as already explained, does not maintain that

has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connection with objects. The supposition of such a connection is therefore without any foundation in reasoning."

It is scarcely needful to point out here the inconsistent assertions, that there are firm and independent existences of which we perceive only the copies or representations, and yet that we cannot possibly attain to any knowledge of such existences, nor to any experience of their connection with the said copies, consequently not even to the knowledge that the copies we perceive *are* copies, or that such existences exist.

Nor ought we to overlook the quiet self-complacent way in which, after assuming the really monstrous fiction that there are images presented by the senses, he puts all persons who doubt that external objects, houses and land, are nothing but perceptions or mental representations, into the dreaded class of the unreflecting.

Hume, as a metaphysician, is exceedingly ingenious, inventive, acute, and profound; but, at the same time, loose and inaccurate. While he is less consistent on the question before us than his distinguished predecessor in philosophy, whose logic he extols, but whose theory (if he intends the passages

there are both ideas and objects, the one being copies of the other, but that objects *are* ideas.

I have quoted to be an account of it),\* he marvelously misconceives, he falls with him into the self-contradictions and nullities of assertion in which all must involve themselves who deny that we directly perceive external objects. With all their acuteness and ingenuity, they are here completely foiled. They cannot bring an argument in support of their theory, however that theory may be shaped, which is not either inconsistent with itself, or which does not rest on the precise ground that they are seeking to establish by it.

Perhaps the subtlest piece of sophistry on the sceptical side of the question respecting the existence of an external world, is one which I find nowhere more plausibly stated than in the Lectures of Dr. Thomas Brown, who, thinking with Hume, that as a mere play of reasoning the sceptical argument admits of no reply, contends at the same time that Berkeley's system presents an imperfect and inaccurate view of that argument.

Speaking of Dr. Reid, in reference to his refuta-

\* In the section of his *Inquiry into the Human Understanding* entitled "Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy," he does not introduce the name of Berkeley, so that there may be a doubt whether he conceived himself to be giving an account of the theory of the latter in the passages referred to; but as he mentions him in a note, appended to the section, beginning "this argument is drawn from Dr. Berkeley;" and in reference to the whole of the doctor's arguments pronounces that they admit of no answer, it is natural to conclude that he supposed himself to be describing Berkeley's peculiar views.

tion of Berkeley, the author of the Lectures proceeds as follows:—

“It is vain for him to say, that the scepticism, proceeding as he thinks, on the belief of ideas in the mind, as direct objects of perception, must fall with these ideas; for though the scepticism may be *consistent* with the belief of ideas as separate existences in the mind, it does not *depend*, in the slightest degree, on their existence or non-existence. We have only to change the term *ideas* into the synonymous phrase *affections or states of the mind*, and the scepticism, if not stronger, is at least in strength exactly what it was before. In the one case the sceptic will say, that we are sensible of *ideas* only, not of *external objects*, which may have *no resemblance to our ideas* ;\* in the other case, that perception is but a state of mind as much as any of our other feelings, and that we are conscious only of this, and other *states or affections of our mind*, which have variously succeeded each other, and not of *external objects, which themselves can be no parts of that train of mental consciousness.*”

“Beyond this consciousness,” it is afterwards added, the sceptic might maintain that we can know nothing.

Now this, like other attempts of the same kind, is both self-inconsistent, and a gratuitous assertion of what, if it is maintained at all, ought to be

\* This applies to Hume's doctrine, but not to Berkeley's.

proved. Perception, as he affirms, is undoubtedly a state of mind ; but it is a state which is necessarily relative to a *perceived object*, and which cannot either take place or be conceived without it. The term has no meaning but in reference to an object distinct from the percipient. To speak of an act of perceiving as taking place without something perceived, is no less a contradiction than to speak of such an act as taking place without a perceiver. By saying it is only a state of mind, Dr. Brown covertly and indirectly excludes the essential correlative. But, as I have shown in a former letter, you cannot take one half of the two-fold fact and drop the other. Standing, for example, is one of the acts of a human being, but he cannot do it without something that is stood upon. To assume one part of such a double, yet indivisible fact, and wholly pass over an equally essential constituent part, is to beg the question. It is as if some one should say,—"Standing is only a certain position of the body, and the body may be put into the same position without there being anything to stand upon : therefore, the latter is not a necessary part of the state or process."

Further, in the phrase, "we are not conscious of external objects," Dr. Brown again begs the question, and is sufficiently met by the counter assertion that we are conscious of perceiving them. External objects being an integrant part of the act of perception, perceiving objects is, as an indivisible whole, a portion of the train of consciousness.

The same kind of sceptical argument which I have here encountered, as adduced by Dr. Brown, might be employed with equal cogency to throw a doubt on those other states of mind of which he speaks as having succeeded each other; nay, even on our very existence before the actual moment, and reduce it to a single point of time.

For, it is plain that my having lived an hour ago is only a matter of recollection; and recollection is only a state of mind, like any other of our feelings. I believe, it is true, that I was then living, but the belief itself is nothing but a state of mind; the very same mental condition might be felt, for aught I know, without the fact of my prior existence having really happened. I can have no proof, at any rate, that it is not so. All that I know is, my present state of consciousness, which, although retrospective in seeming, and called recollection, no more implies that I lived an hour ago than the state of consciousness, which is called perception, implies the existence of external objects.

All that remains, then, to supply the place of logical demonstration is the paramount force of the irresistible belief which I feel in my own previous existence. My existence half-an-hour ago, and the external independent existence of the paper on which I am writing, and the pen which I hold in my hand, are thus, to say the least, equally problematical.

Dr. Brown, it will be observed, while he gives his sceptical argument about an external world as unanswerable, by no means impugns on his own part the existence of objects without us, but characterises our mental state relating to it as an irresistible conviction. The belief, he says, of a system of external things, is a state of mind which itself forms, and will ever form, a part of the train of our consciousness.

In such expressions will be seen, if I mistake not, the disadvantage of not confining the term belief to matters of a contingent character, or to those conclusions and propositions which can rest on nothing stronger than contingent proofs.

We cannot, as I have shown, have any *evidence* for the existence of external objects, nor is it a case in which evidence can be required, or be pertinent, or even admissible.

Evidence, or, in other words, the adduction of something we know, is needed only to enable us to believe something we cannot or do not know. But to perceive external objects is to know them; than this we can conceive no other or higher knowledge of material things.

It is, therefore, in my view, an injurious perversion of language to say that we believe in their existence, when we can use the completer and superior assertion that we know it.

To apply the term belief to this knowledge is to rank it with mental states, admitting more or less



(however infinitesimal the portion) of doubt, and, consequently, tends to the confusion of intellectual phenomena, which accuracy of thought requires to be carefully distinguished. It unsettles and renders indefinite the acceptation of both knowing and believing.

I must crave your patience while I proceed to mention another radical fallacy in the ideal theory, whatever may be the form in which it is presented. There is in it a latent self-contradiction which I think you will readily discover when I point it out. Although my argument lies more directly against Berkeley's form of the theory, it will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to any other.

Mark what is comprehended in the assertion here in question, that we perceive ideas in the mind, and do not perceive independent external objects. By it two classes of entities are plainly discriminated: ideas in the mind are placed in contradistinction to material things out of the mind.

Well, observe the consequences: in order to place two things in contradistinction to each other, you must of course know both. When you assert that objects are only ideas in the mind, not things out of the mind, you must, in order to speak rationally and consistently, know what things out of the mind are.

But, as the theoretic idealist denies altogether this knowledge of independent material things out of the mind, he is precluded from predicating what

they are or what they are not; and, consequently, when he speaks of them at all, and especially in contradistinction to ideas in the mind, it must be without any meaning except what is derived from the palpable self-contradiction of assuming the knowledge he denies. He cannot form any proposition about them without presupposing their having been perceived as external.

When he tells us that it is impossible there should be any such thing as an outward object, how or where did he obtain the meaning of the last term of his own assertion?

If, indeed, these ideas were truly the sole things that we perceive, neither Berkeley nor any other philosopher could ever have dreamed of asserting that we know nothing else, any more than the silliest babbler in science would dream of informing his neighbours that gold is only gold, and not an unknown substance *x*.

The very position, in a word, that we perceive nothing but ideas *in* the mind could not have been thought of unless we had perceived something different from them—something *out* of the mind.

A Berkeleian is reduced, in truth, to this dilemma: if he knows what external things are, it can be only by perceiving them as external,—which contradicts his theory. If, on the other hand, he does not know what they are, he is incapable of using the expression external with any meaning, and could,

in fact, never have invented or thought of employing it.

The same result is obtained from Berkeley's doctrine of the correspondence of perception and conception, a point of view which merely exhibits the contradiction in a slightly varied form. He repeatedly insists that we can conceive nothing except as we have perceived it. "My conceiving power," he says, "does not extend beyond real existence or perception." But he also teaches that we cannot *perceive* objects as external; we consequently cannot *conceive* them as external. When, therefore, he speaks of external objects, he speaks of things of which, by his own doctrine, he can form no conception—in other words, he falls into unmeaning propositions.

Again, his assertions afford this curious result.

When he affirms it to be impossible to *conceive* anything otherwise than as we have *perceived* it, he means, according to his own interpretation, that we can conceive only those ideas which the Author of Nature had previously imprinted on the senses. Well, then, the Deity either imprints the tree before me on my senses, as external, or he does not: if he does, then the tree *is* external, or he imprints what is false; if he does not imprint it as external, how came I by such an impression or idea at all?

## LETTER XVIII.

THEORIES OF PERCEPTION CONTINUED. — HOBBS,  
D'ALEMBERT, AND STEWART.

THE course of these discussions has brought me to a point that is favourable for considering some parts of the subject of perception which have seldom been perspicuously treated.

A common misapprehension about perception appears to me to arise from not clearly and steadily distinguishing the material operations concerned and the conscious state which is the result of them.

The whole process may be described in general terms as follows:—

Certain qualities in the object external to our bodily frame, whether operating or not through an inorganic medium, interposed between the object and the organs of sense, occasion certain conditions in the matter composing or pervading our nerves and brain. These conditions in the nerves and brain are followed or accompanied by certain states of consciousness, which states of consciousness we designate by the phrase, the perception of external objects.

Now it is important to remark two facts in

relation to such cases of action on our nervous system:—

1. When we perceive an object, we have not any consciousness of the conditions of the nerves and brain concerned in the resulting act of perception, nor of the motions of any inorganic medium between the object and our organ: we are conscious of perceiving the external object, and nothing else. In seeing we are not conscious of the retina, nor of the rays of light impinging upon it, nor of the picture there delineated. In hearing we are not conscious of the drum of the ear, nor of the pulses of the air by which it is struck, nor, in either case, of any communication between those parts and the brain.

2. As we are unconscious of the physical process, so what we are conscious of perceiving is not at all affected by our being able or unable to trace that process of which perception is the result. In other words, our perception of external objects is not alterable by any insight or want of insight into its physical causes. What is designated by the words "seeing an object," is the same mental state in the child, the savage, and the philosopher, and as a simple modification of consciousness neither wants nor admits of any analysis or explanation. Although the physical events leading to it may be minutely investigated, it cannot itself be resolved into any other mental state or states.

You may trace the course of light from the

object to the organ, you may follow its refractions by the lens of the eye, you may detect the picture on the retina, you may explore the connection of the optic nerves with the brain; but you do not by all these discoveries, valuable as they are, alter in the slightest degree the resulting state of consciousness denominated seeing the object. Although they are facts in the physical process absolutely necessary to the result, a knowledge of them does not in the least modify the consequent perception.

Hence it follows that no extent of investigation, no discovery in science, can ever change the character of our acquaintance with external objects. If we could push our insight of nature to the utmost imaginable extreme, if we could ascertain the shape and pursue the movements of every particle of matter in the world around us, we should still have only the same *kind* of knowledge, although highly exalted in degree, which we have now: we should still be acquainted with the material universe only through our sensitive organs. The telescope and microscope, while they extend the reach of our senses, do not in the faintest degree alter the nature of our perceptions. And further, all the various steps in the physical process through which we become cognisant of any external object, are external objects themselves, and are perceived in the same way as the rest.

Another point which it may appear almost puerile to insist upon, but which, as will hereafter appear,

it is needful to notice, is that our acts or states of perception cannot produce any effect upon the objects perceived. The mere action of looking at an object does not manifestly affect its qualities; it merely presents an organ for some of those qualities to act upon: nor does the withdrawal of the look make the slightest difference in their nature; it does no more than take away the nervous expanse on which some of them operated.

The simple and proper view is, that in perception, except by the act of directing our organs to external objects, we are passive, and may be described as possessing organs through which, without any other active cooperation on our part, certain conditions of matter produce in us states of consciousness termed the perception of objects or their qualities.

Some of these qualities, it is almost needless to say, are perceived through one organ and its nervous apparatus, some through another.

Colour is a quality of matter perceptible, as far as we know (speaking of terrestrial existences), only by a being provided with an organ called an eye: sound only by a being provided with an organ called an ear.

When a percipient being having such organs, is placed amongst these conditions or qualities of matter, he perceives certain objects; that is, he sees colours and hears sounds: when he is removed from them, the conditions continue to exist, but

the objects of course are unperceived—the act of perception ceases.

In illustration of this subject, let us turn to some well known combination of the visible and the audible, such as the magnificent Falls of Niagara.

Here for ages, before a human eye ever looked upon them, or a human ear ever heard their deafening thunder, the same actions were taking place in the water and the air as take place in the presence of eager crowds of modern visitors. The rays of the sun, whenever they fell on the scene, were refracted by the vapour rising above the torrent; the air was constantly agitated by the vast mass of water precipitating itself over the rock. But there was no perception of what was going on, of the tranquil iris bending over the abyss, or of the roar of the headlong cataract. It required a being endowed with the special organs called eyes and ears to see the beautiful bow, and to hear the stupendous roar. The moment these organs were brought into contact with the agencies at work, the iris and the roar were perceived.

Some one, nevertheless, may reply that, even according to the representation just given, colour (to speak only of one quality for the sake of simplification) does not exist in the object when no eye looks upon it. Yes, I rejoin, it exists ready to present itself to any visual organ which may be turned towards it. The perception of colour, indeed, would not exist in the supposed case, because



it is a mental act, and the difficulty on your part arises from your meaning by the term colour a perceived instead of a perceptible quality. A perceived quality cannot of course exist without a percipient, but the quality or object is at all times perceptible, and continues to exist unaltered whether your eye is upon it or not. You surely do not require that an object should *look* coloured when there is no eye to see it. The only possible thing is that it should appear so whenever there is a spectator to observe it. This is all that can be meant by a coloured body; it is a body that you always perceive to be coloured when you turn your eyes upon it. How it looks when unseen is a question I do not presume to interfere with; not being able to conceive any method by which so self-contradictory an inquiry can be satisfied.

A favourite theory on this particular subject of colour has been that the colour is in the mind; according to some that it inheres in the mind; and in the language of others, that the mind spreads it over external objects; all which are attempts to explain what does not require or admit of explanation.

The preceding considerations will, I think, enable us to discern where the weakness of this kind of speculation lies.

Let us first examine it as stated by Hobbes.

He maintains "that the subject wherein colour and image are inherent, is not the object or thing

seen: that there is nothing *without us* (really) which we call an image or colour; that the said image or colour is but *an apparition to us, of the motion, agitation, or alteration which the object worketh in the brain* or spirits, or some internal substance of the head; that as in vision, so also in *conceptions* that arise from the other senses, *the subject of their inherence is not the object but the sentient.*" He subsequently adds: "whatsoever accidents or qualities our senses make us think there be in the world, *they be not there, but are seeming and apparitions only*: the things that really are in the world without us, are those motions by which these seemings are caused."

Here it is to be remarked, in the first place, that the image [object] or colour is asserted to be only the appearance to us of the motion worked in the brain.

Supposing such a motion to take place (which is doubtless a very probable inference), yet, as I have already explained, we are not in the least conscious of it, and consequently it cannot be said to appear to us; it may be the cause of the appearance,—*i. e.*, of our seeing the coloured object, but cannot be that which we see, or the appearance itself. The supposed motion in the brain is a physical event, which we infer but do not perceive; the result—the perception of the object—is a mental one, or, in other words, it is the particular state of consciousness called seeing.

That "there is nothing without us which we call an image or colour" is obviously not only a mere assumption, but also at variance with our consciousness. We are conscious of perceiving the image or colour (or, more correctly, coloured object) as external—as something different from ourselves.

To say that the colour inheres in the mind—a vague phrase at the best—is, in truth, to assert that the mind is coloured, or, in equivalent language, that we are conscious of an internal colour (green for example), as we are conscious of an emotion like joy or grief; whereas we are, in reality, conscious of perceiving an external colour.

A poet may be allowed to talk of "the soft green of the soul," but a philosopher can scarcely be permitted to use language which converts such figures into literal facts.

You will probably notice that there is an ambiguity in Hobbes's statement, which, if unexplained, may occasion my strictures to appear unjust. At first he speaks of *colour* as being inherent in the mind, afterwards of the conception\* (*i. e.*, perception) of it being so. Between these two statements there is a radical difference: the first erroneously affirming an *external object* to be in the mind, the second truly affirming *the perception of it*

\* Hobbes unfortunately uses the word *conception* for both what we perceive through the organs of sense, and the subsequent idea or recollection of it.

to be mental ; but it is plain that the former was the expression of his real meaning.

In regard to his doctrine in the last sentence of the extract, that the real things without us are motions, he overlooks that if this could be verified, such motions would still, according to his own showing, be only appearances to the observer. We cannot know any motions but such as are visible or tangible ; but whatever is visible or tangible is, according to him, only *seeming* ; therefore, after all, his real things, or motions, turn out to be merely appearances, and the conclusion to which he must logically come, is that, for us at least, there is nothing but appearances in the world.

Perhaps, however, the most striking exhibition of this unsubstantial theory, with some variations, is presented to us by D'Alembert.

"It is very evident," he says, "that the word colour does not denote any property of matter, but only a modification of the mind ; that whiteness, for example, redness, &c., exist only in us, and not at all in the body to which we refer them : nevertheless, this disposition, which, by a habit acquired in infancy, we possess, to refer to a material and divisible substance what really belongs to a spiritual and simple one, is a very singular thing, and worthy of the attention of metaphysicians ; and nothing is perhaps more extraordinary in the operations of the mind than to

see it *transport its sensations out of itself and spread them, so to speak, over a substance to which they cannot belong.*" Mr. Stewart, who has quoted this passage more than once, as if it had particularly charmed his imagination (and it is certainly quite consonant with his style of thought), says: "It would be difficult to state the fact in question in terms more brief, precise, and perspicuous." In regard to the diction, I will not dissent from the eulogy; but to praise the passage as a statement of fact, is particularly unfortunate.

Having already explained that colour is a material or external property, and the perception of it is all that is mental, I may at once pass on to the lively picture of the mind transporting its sensations out of itself and spreading them over external objects. Although this beautiful description may be considered as figurative (the idea, in truth, could not be otherwise expressed), it is obviously meant to assert that the mind literally, in some way or other, imparts to the objects the colours in which they are arrayed.

Of such a process, and every step implied in it, I am, for my own part, wholly unconscious; and must regard it, on that account, to be altogether imaginary and fictitious, as well as for reasons which I will proceed to assign.

If it were real, the sensation of any colour (*green*, for example) must first exist in the mind, for how-

ever short a time, as a purely internal feeling, arising, nevertheless, from some unperceived substance before the organ of vision. But then comes the problem—how we are to discover that an imperceptible external object exists which, in some inexplicable way, has put our minds upon feeling *green*, and which in its nude achromatic state is waiting outside to be invested with that colour. What, too, is it (we are irresistibly led to ask) that causes us to spread *green* over the growing wheat, and *red* over the poppy which intrudes amongst it? I am surprised not only at Mr. Stewart's overlooking these legitimate consequences of the doctrine he so cordially and fully accepted, but that he failed also to see how completely it puts an end to his maintaining the visual perception of an external world, and ranks him so far amongst the idealists. It is impossible, as all acknowledge, to see form and extension without colour; but since, according to the hypothesis, we do not at first see colour as external, it follows that we see nothing as external; so that, not only is there nothing to direct us in spreading the internal *green* over the external object (the disposition to do which D'Alembert curiously ascribes to habit), but there is no mode of ascertaining through the organ of sight that there is anything external at all. Everything is mental; if colour is in the mind, as he teaches, then must form and extension be there too; and how they are to be got out, or made to appear

external, passes all comprehension. The whole theory is due to the imagination.

In this singular metaphysical flight the French and the English philosopher have alike "covered their eyes with their wings."

## LETTER XIX.

## THEORIES OF PERCEPTION CONTINUED.—KANT.

AFTER having followed me through an examination of the doctrines of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, D'Alembert, and Stewart on the perception of external objects, I fear you will scarcely have patience to encounter a repetition of the scrutiny directed to the analogous doctrines of Kant.

It is, however, of some importance, I think, to take his mode of presenting the question into consideration, and to put a succinct exposure of its fallacies on record. At the same time, if you feel weary of these vain speculations raised about a very simple matter, you will not lose much by skipping over the whole of the present Letter and the one immediately following, as they will contain little but a renewed examination of assumptions and assertions already disposed of, under a different form.

For the sake of perspicuity as well as to relieve the close attention required by these abstruse questions, I purpose to notice, first, Kant's negative doctrine (if I may so term it) respecting the nature of our perception or knowledge of external things; and, secondly, his positive doctrine respecting the action of our minds upon them.



In pursuance of this plan, I will devote the present Letter to his doctrine respecting our knowledge of the external world.

Following after Locke, he maintains in various forms of expression, but with more thoroughness and consistency than the English philosopher, that we have, in reality, no knowledge of external things.

Sometimes he tells us that we perceive only phenomena, not things in themselves; or, as he himself expresses it, "that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of phenomenon;" "that the things which we envisage [perceive through the senses] are not that in themselves for which we take them." Again he affirms, "We know nothing but our manner of perceiving them;" "what the objects would be in themselves would still never be known by the clearest cognition of their phenomenon, which alone is given to us." He proceeds to say, that "by our sensibility [*i. e.* through our organs of sense], we are not acquainted merely obscurely, but not at all, with the quality of things in themselves; and so soon as we remove our subjective quality [*i. e.* the percipient faculty or mind], the represented object, together with the properties which the sensible intuition attributed to it, is not to be met with anywhere; neither can it be met with, since this very subjective quality determines the form of the object as phenomenon."\*

\* Critick of Pure Reason, p. 47.

Here he describes in various phrases the process of perception, or rather non-perception, through the organs of sense; but in all of them there are inconsistency and confusion of thought on the very surface.

He speaks of things as existing, yet tells us that we are incapable of perceiving or knowing them: we know only their phenomena, and they are not that in themselves for which we take them. But (to repeat an argument I have already used), if we are acquainted *only* with phenomena, how can we speak without self-contradiction of anything else? How can we find out that objects which we cannot know have any existence at all? How can we tell that what we perceive are only phenomena, and not real things, when, to distinguish between phenomena and real things, we must perceive not only the former, but the latter, which, we are told in the same breath, we are incapable of doing? Thus, if you say with Kant, that you perceive only phenomena, you subject yourself to the reply that it is impossible for you to tell that they are not realities, since you have nothing to compare them with; and as it is not worth while contending about a name, you may as well call them realities at once.

To the assertion that the things which we perceive are not in themselves what we take them to be—in other words, that the realities are unlike their phenomena, which is only the same doc-

trine in different phrase—a similar argument applies.

You can tell whether two things are alike or unlike only by perceiving them both, or having a knowledge of both. If you confess that you know nothing at all of one, you are plainly not in a condition to pronounce whether it is like or unlike the other: if you are not acquainted with the original, you cannot judge of the resemblance or want of resemblance in the copy.

Another strange position in the preceding passage is, that “we know nothing but our manner of perceiving objects,” which, if not inconsistent with his other assertions, is at least equally self-contradictory. Knowing our manner of perceiving objects implies that we *do* perceive them, otherwise we assuredly could not know the manner of it. Mark, too, the assertion that, as soon as we remove our subjective quality, the represented object with its properties, is not and cannot be met with anywhere. Met with? By whom? “Meeting with” is the act of a percipient being, and, consequently, the assertion implies that, if we turn away from the object, it straightway becomes imperceptible not only to ourselves, but to any “subjective quality” that might go in search of it. On this theory every object would be created afresh in every act of perception, which is carrying the matter farther even than it was carried by Berkeley, who being put to a strait by the suppo-

sition that an idea would be annihilated when it ceased to be perceived by your mind or mine, adroitly took refuge in the allegation that this by no means followed, since it might be perceived by some other mind.

It is worth while to advert more particularly to the proposition often reiterated by Kant, that we cannot know things in themselves—a proposition extensively accepted by modern philosophers.

This is, in my view, a perfectly unmeaning assertion. We cannot form the slightest conception of knowing external things, except as we do know them, *i. e.* through the organs of sense. Do you demur at this? Then be so good as to tell me the precise signification of knowing things in themselves; give me a specimen of that sort of knowledge we have not; and point out how you have gained so curious a piece of transcendental information.

No one manifestly is entitled to deny that our knowledge is of things in themselves, unless he not only possesses the sort of knowledge which he denies to others, and has found on comparison that we—the rest of the human race—have only a knowledge of things as they are *not* in themselves, but actually produces it for our examination. Till that is done, assertions about knowing things in themselves must be regarded as utterly without meaning.

Hobbes, whose doctrine, as we have seen, agrees

with that of Kant, in declaring what we perceive to be nothing but appearances, undertook to furnish the information I have asked for; he attempted to show that things in themselves are motions which give rise to the appearances perceived. His words (to repeat a single sentence of a passage before quoted and criticised) are, "Whatever accidents or qualities our senses make us think there be in the world, they be not there but are seeming and appearances only: *the things that really are in the world without us*, are those motions by which these seemings are caused."\*

This, however, is only removing the phenomena a step back, and would not be accepted by Kant as at all reaching the transcendental objects—the things in themselves, which, according to him, we can never know. The motions in Hobbes's theory, could we follow them with the greatest minuteness, would, as I before remarked, be in their turn nothing but appearances; nor was it possible for either him or Kant to form the faintest conception of any objects or events generically different as wholes, or in their constituent parts from such as we actually observe.

\* Here his argument is in effect that, because we can trace motions as concerned in producing the result called perceiving an object, we cannot perceive the object; while the truth is, as I have shown, that the perception of anything is not at all altered by our ignorance or knowledge of the material process through which it is effected.

## LETTER XX.

## THEORIES OF PERCEPTION CONTINUED. — KANT.

HAVING seen how, in what I have termed his negative doctrine, the German professor teaches that we know only appearances, not things in themselves, and that the real or transcendental objects behind these appearances lie hid under an impenetrable veil, and are not what we take them to be, it is natural for us to inquire into the positive part of the subject, to ask how these appearances arise? How is it that they present themselves before us?

And here we come to the greatest marvel of the whole doctrine: it turns out, after all, that the objects conjectured to lie hid behind the appearances (for conjecture is the only thing possible) do not originate the said appearances, but, that we ourselves in some inexplicable way create the phenomena or confer the qualities we perceive.

It is scarcely possible to state such a doctrine except in self-contradictory language; and it will be best, therefore, to keep to the philosopher's own expressions.

In a passage quoted in my last Letter, he tells us that the sensible intuition attributes to the represented object its qualities, and that when the subjective quality or mind is withdrawn, the said object and its qualities vanish and are nowhere to be found; that is, in a word, we create all the appearances we perceive. For observe, by this passage it is really asserted that we attribute *all* the properties to the object; which is a sheer impossibility, and to speak of it is nothing less than logically absurd. Without stopping to examine whether any real fact is expressed by the word *attribute* thus used, I may venture to say that, before we can attribute any qualities to an object, we must know something about it; that is, in fact, we must know that it exists; which implies that we know some of its qualities as an indispensable condition to our attributing others. An object to be perceived at all must have some quality or qualities to begin with. It is in itself, indeed, a quality or a congeries of qualities. You may possibly attribute other qualities besides the first, or, at least, you may speak of doing it without absurdity; but you cannot possibly attribute all, for that would be making out the object to be originally nothing; it would be ascribing properties to a non-entity.

In the same passage we are told, as a varied expression of the doctrine, that the subjective quality determines the form of the object as phenomenon, or, in other words, the mind determines the forms

or appearances of objects perceived ; or, again, that it determines what appearances shall come before it.

I have already shown that with the exception of directing the organs to these objects, the mind is passive in perception ; and that what is perceived by it is the joint result of the material conditions in the object and in the medium on the one hand, and of the material affections of the nerves and brain on the other. Such, at least, are all the facts we can trace in the process. To prove this it is sufficient to adduce the organs of hearing and of sight. The nerve of the ear is impassive to everything but aerial vibrations ; the nerve of the eye to everything but light. Here it is surely the respective constitutions of the two nerves, conjointly with the motions in inorganic matter acting upon them, that determine the forms of the objects ; in other words, determine the effects on the mind, or the resulting states of consciousness ; or, in still different language, determine what is perceived.

If aerial vibrations acting on one kind of nerve on which rays of light have no effect, cause the percipient being to hear, and rays of light acting on another kind of nerve on which aerial vibrations have no effect, cause him to see, how can the mind be said to determine or even modify the result ? The kind of perception is obviously determined by the kind of nerve acted upon. The species under each kind are as obviously determined respectively



by the special aerial vibrations and the special rays of light impinging on the organs.

The result in each case is a definite state or modification of consciousness; in the one case called seeing, in the other hearing.

Kant's doctrine is, that what we see and what we hear are determined by our own minds; and it amounts to this, that these states of consciousness determine the form and manner of their own existence; a species of self-creation to which there is no analogy in nature, nor even any counterpart in fiction, unless we turn to the Kilkenny cats, so famed for eating each other up, and suppose they had previously performed the rival wonder of respectively giving birth to themselves.\*

Another mode of stating the doctrine, which I must not pass over without notice, is that the mind is not only acted upon, but acts upon the objects.

How the mind, however, can act upon anything

\* This is by no means without parallel in German philosophy. Schelling, speaking of "the ground of the divine existence," which "might also," he says, "become that of things" is represented as proceeding thus:— "If, with reference to that ground with which we had become already acquainted under the name of absolute potency or of nature (*naturans*), we wish to bring it nearer to us men, we may say, that it is *the longing which that which is eternally one, feels to give birth to itself!*"—*Chalybäus on Speculative Philosophy, Edersheim's Translation*, p. 315. Hegel furnishes another instance according to the author last quoted, "The second point to which we have to attend is, *how this subjective notion gives existence to itself.*"—*Ibid.* p. 386.

by merely perceiving it, I am unable for my own part to comprehend. We are certainly not conscious of such an operation, neither can we observe any external effects attributable to it. To act upon objects is to produce some change in them, and since, by looking on a tree or other visible entity, I certainly produce no change in it, the doctrine in that sense is obviously false. The simplest action of this kind conceivable is spreading colour over objects according to the theory of D'Alembert the value of which has been already exhibited. Let us suppose, therefore, the meaning to be (and this is the only other meaning I can imagine), that the mind operates upon the impression received from the object so as to modify it. If this were the fact, we should of course be conscious, first, of the original impression, and, then, of the act of modifying it. But of this process we are not conscious, nor is it what the supporters of the doctrine can consistently mean; they must intend it to be understood that the impression is, in some way or other, modified *in transitu* before we become conscious of it or receive it. But, an impression not received (*i.e.* an impression not impressed) is a contradiction. A physical impression on the organs of sense, or, in other words, a motion communicated to them, may be conceived to be modified on its passage to the brain (if for argument's sake such an expression may be used), by the quality or condition of the nerve; but a mental impression, if modified at all,

must be operated upon after having been produced, as it obviously cannot be modified before it exists. Of such a mental operation we are, I repeat, utterly unconscious.

All these various but equivalent propositions, that the mind attributes their qualities to objects, that it determines the forms or appearances of objects, that it acts upon them, are self-inconsistent; and they are, moreover, assertions of mental events which never occur, of which we have no internal consciousness, which we cannot externally observe, and which are in truth purely imaginary.

They appear to me to have arisen from an oversight or non-appreciation of the simple truth I have before urged, that perceiving external objects is a primary fact of consciousness not susceptible of analysis or explanation, and beyond which it is impossible to go.

You may analyse a compound visible object into its separate parts and attributes,—into its form, its colour, its motion, and so on; but this is an analysis of the thing perceived, not of the act of perception: or you may trace every step of the physical processes of which perception is the result; but this, as I have before remarked, does not in the slightest degree affect the simple and direct character of the act of perception itself.

Perceiving must be considered as a primary state of consciousness in the same way as pain or hunger or fear or joy, the causes of which you may

ascertain, but the nature of which no knowledge can alter and no explanation elucidate.

Kant thought he had made a great discovery in the method of treating these subjects when he proposed, instead of tracing the effects of objects on the mind, to reverse the process, by tracing the operation of the mind on objects — an operation which never happens to take place — comparing his procedure to that of Copernicus when putting aside the hypothesis that the whole heavens revolve round the motionless earth, that celebrated astronomer set himself to try what results would be obtained by supposing the heavens to be stationary and the earth to revolve on its axis.

The German metaphysician, nevertheless, flattered himself with a comparison which he was not entitled to draw.

The single point of analogy between the two cases—certainly not a very extraordinary one—is, that in both there was a change, or an alleged change, in method; and this single point is nothing compared with the concomitant discrepancy in every respect besides. Copernicus abandoned a cumbrous, complicated, and false hypothesis for a simple and true theory, beautifully consistent with all known phenomena; while Kant dismissed a simple and true mode of viewing his subject for an arbitrary supposition, not only without any foundation in facts, but absolutely opposed to them.

## LETTER XXI.

## IDEAS.

It scarcely needs stating, except by way of introduction to what follows, that as there are no independent entities called ideas or images in perception, so there are none in conception.

In the act of conceiving or recollecting an object in its absence, or when it no longer exists, there is obviously nothing but the concipient being affected in a particular way; there is by the supposition no external object before him, and there is no independent image, or form, or phantasm, present to his consciousness. It is simply the man mentally acting or mentally affected.

Thus the acts called respectively perception and conception agree in the negative circumstance, that in neither of them is there any independent entity called an idea or representation; but at the same time they differ in this, that there is in conception, or rather conception itself is, a state of mind corresponding to the term idea or representation, while in perception there is nothing at all to which the term idea or representation can be applied.

The false hypothesis, however, of there being

ideas in perception may have sprung out of the undeniable fact that there are ideas in conception.

As when we turn away from looking at a tree, we are conscious of an idea or image of it remaining, although the tree is no longer in sight, it may have easily occurred to any one that, since the idea of the tree must have been generated while the object was present, the said idea must have then existed in the mind; hence, it may be argued, it is by means of ideas that external objects are perceived, or, what amounts to the same thing, it is the ideas which are perceived and not the objects.

Such a train of loose reasoning would be most likely to occur to those who maintained that the ideas we have, when thinking of external objects, are entities substantially distinct from the mind. On that hypothesis the reflex deduction I have supposed would have much plausibility. Nothing would seem more reasonable than that such independent existences, if they had place in conception, should have previously had place in perception.

But, putting aside separate entities, and taking only the admitted fact that we have ideas of objects in their absence, although such ideas are purely mental modifications, a similar train of thought might be suggested; a reflex transfer of ideas, so to speak, might be made from conception to perception, and what is true of the former ascribed to the latter.

Whether, nevertheless, the doctrine of ideas in perception is ascribable to this origin or not, its utter groundlessness is plain, and the truth remains unaffected that ideas have nothing to do with the perception of external objects—bear no part in the process—but are mental phenomena which take place in the absence of the objects which they represent.

This last expression indicates their essential character. In every possible case ideas are representative; *i. e.* they are invariably representations of some objects which we have formerly perceived, or some internal affections or operations which we have formerly experienced.

They correspond to real objects or events formerly present to the mind, as portraits correspond to their originals. Hume and other metaphysicians, obliged to resort to terms borrowed from material operations, call them copies; others again, in certain cases, call them images; and Mr. Stewart, as we have seen, denominates them transcripts. As in many cases this and similar phraseology may not seem appropriate, it will be needful to enter into some explanations in reference to it, and to my own occasional employment of it, as well as to the more comprehensive term idea.

To avoid repetition and prolixity, philosophers are apt, in the discussion of these subjects, to consider chiefly visible objects, and their mental representations, which may very properly be

termed images. This I myself have done in the preceding speculations, and I may find it convenient to continue to do it in the sequel; but the remarks throughout are just as applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to the representations of emotions and intellectual operations, and also of what we perceive through the other organs of sense, as of what we perceive through the organ of vision. The term *images* is, indeed, not appropriate to the former. We cannot well speak of the image of an emotion such as grief, nor of that of a musical note, or of a fragrant smell; and even to speak of *copies* in such cases seems harsh: but we can conceive or recollect the emotion, the note, and the smell with as much distinctness, if not vividness, as we can call to mind an extended object; and usage allows us in each of these cases to apply the word *idea*. Every one, I presume, can do as I can, who have no particular musical aptitude, namely, go over a favourite air or tune in his own mind as perfectly as he can picture to himself the countenance of a favourite friend, or the forms and colours of a familiar scene; and if any one resembles the poet Wordsworth in not being able to do this, he can at all events mentally repeat the first stanza of Gray's "Elegy in a Country Church Yard," or the opening of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," or the concluding lines of Campbell's "Pleasures of Hope," or some other celebrated fragment of verse. No recollections, indeed, can be more perfect



than those of measured and rhythmical sounds. In reference to taste and smell, not many probably amongst those who are likely to be my readers would find any difficulty in recalling the peculiar fragrance and flavour of the strawberry and the pine apple. To mark the representative acts or states of mind, in all these cases, the general term idea may be not only correctly employed, but perhaps with less harshness or dissonance than any other.

In order to prevent misconstruction, it may be also needful to explain that in speaking of ideas as mental copies or representations, it is not intended to say that they are always exact representations of individual objects or states; they are sometimes such, and sometimes new combinations, as mentioned under the head of imagining; but in the latter case the simple ideas, or elements out of which they are composed, are derived from objects formerly perceived, or states of mind formerly felt. Amongst philosophers this point is I believe well understood.

You will observe, then, that in my vocabulary the term idea denotes representative intellectual phenomena—phenomena which have their archetypes in real objects and events physical or mental. But I go farther than this. It will be my aim to show, in the following Letters, that there are none but representative affections of the mind to which the term can be correctly and consistently and

without confusion applied; and that when it has been applied, or rather when it has been supposed to be applied, to anything else, there has been a misconception of the phenomena designated, or intended to be designated, on the occasions in question.

I am perfectly aware that, on a first glance, this may appear an arbitrary limitation of its meaning, inasmuch as such things are said to exist as general and abstract ideas; and since we certainly do not perceive any general or abstract objects to match them—the very supposition of such objects being absurd—the alleged general and abstract ideas cannot, it may be argued, be of a representative character.

Moreover, all must admit that we are in the constant use of general and abstract terms, the existence of which, it may be urged, would be unaccountable, if they were not the names of either objects or ideas.

This appears at first sight a formidable difficulty; and it must be met, or my position must be abandoned.

I purpose, therefore, in the two or three Letters immediately following, to inquire into what passes in the mind, or, in other words, what we are conscious of; first, when general terms, and, secondly, when abstract terms, are used.

This I am sensible is not the usual mode of

stating the inquiry; but it is often, I think, exceedingly advantageous to take unsettled questions out of their traditional forms, and put them into different, although in the main equivalent, language.

## LETTER XXII.

## GENERAL TERMS.

IT will conduce to the clear understanding of what passes in the mind on occasion of hearing or using general and abstract language, if we consider in the first place certain phenomena of perception.

When we perceive an external object we may see it either near or at a distance, either in partial obscurity or in broad daylight, either hastily or with a leisurely survey. We may, for example, see a man a quarter of a mile off where we can only just discern that he *is* a man, not a woman or a boy ; or we may see him so close as to recognise in him a well-known acquaintance. A difference in the degree of light by which we see him, or in the rapidity with which we pass by him, may produce a similar difference in the distinctness of our perception. In a railway carriage we are sometimes wheeled along with such velocity, that we cannot distinguish the faces of those we pass, but only just perceive they are human beings.

If the objects we have perceived with these

different degrees of distinctness have been seen by us for the first time, our recollections, when we afterwards call them to mind, will partake in this respect of the character of our perceptions. We shall not recollect clearly and definitely an object that we have seen only obscurely and vaguely, however long and minutely we may dwell upon it in thought.

If, on the contrary, the object perceived is a familiar one, as, for example, an intimate friend, although the actual glimpse we catch of him is indistinct and momentary, it is sufficient, except in extreme cases, both to produce a recognition of his person and, if we pause upon the thought at all, to raise up a complete image of the man.

It is astonishing, when we reflect upon it, and at the same time important to remark, what a slight and fugitive glance at an object enables us to recognise it when it is already perfectly familiar to us.

But there is another cause of variety in the distinctness of our recollections besides the character of our original acts of perception.

As the objects perceived may appear faint and ill-defined, from the velocity with which they pass before our eyes, so our recollections of external objects, even when the latter have been leisurely and thoroughly observed, may be faint and ill-defined from an analogous cause; namely, the swiftness with which they pass through our minds,

or, in other words, succeed each other in our consciousness.

This may perhaps be most readily shown in those cases where words are the means of recalling external phenomena.

It is a function of words, and more obviously of the names of external things (which alone it is needful here to consider), to revive in the memory objects formerly perceived.

Confining our attention, then, to the names of external objects, let us first take the case of proper names.

The name of an intimate friend, whom I have just heard mentioned, has brought to my mind a distinct remembrance of his personal appearance, and, in the same way, the names of my other friends, when I dwell upon them, recall their respective personal appearances with all possible vivacity and completeness. But if I hear a long list of such names rapidly read over, the images, as they are usually termed, or mental representations of my friends, will no longer appear before me with the same fulness and distinctness; a faint and fugitive image of each will be all I shall be conscious of. There will be as much difference, in this respect, between the leisurely and the hurried remembrance, as there is between a deliberate survey of the passengers in a railway carriage when it is stationary, and a glimpse caught of them when it is moving swiftly before the sight. Yet, not-

withstanding the velocity of the ideal procession through my mind, and the consequent incompleteness of the several figures in it, I distinctly recognise each transitory form as that of a well-known acquaintance, just as I recognise their actual persons when seen as before supposed by a momentary glimpse in passing.

Let us next turn to the consideration of common names or general concrete terms; names or terms applicable not to a single individual exclusively, but to any one of a number of individuals, or a class.

We shall find that what passes in the mind when common names are heard, corresponds very closely to what takes place when proper names are heard.

This is very obvious in the case of the names of simple objects, such as snow, water, daisy, primrose, harebell, oak-tree. On hearing these words slowly pronounced, I have in my mind as complete and lively an image of the object denoted by each appellation, as I have on listening to a deliberate enumeration of proper names when I am familiar with the personal appearances of the individuals to whom they belong.

There is indeed, it may be alleged, this difference between the two cases, that the proper name ties me down to a particular image, while the general name leaves me at liberty to vary the image within certain limits; or, to describe the matter with greater precision, the proper name raises up the image of one individual object, while the general

name raises up the image sometimes of one individual of the class formerly seen, sometimes of another, not unfrequently of many individuals in succession; and it sometimes suggests an image made up of elements from several different objects by a latent process of which I am not conscious.

This difference between the two cases, although real, is, however, less than, on a first view, we are apt to suppose.

Compare the effect produced by the proper name "*Queen Victoria*," with that which ensues from hearing the common name of some simple object, such as a primrose. Simple flowers of the same species are so much alike, that the image rising up in the mind on hearing the word "primrose" is almost as little varied, on different occasions, as on hearing the words "*Queen Victoria*." To a person, indeed, who happens to have seen the Queen in diversified states of emotion, and in a variety of dresses and attitudes, not to mention coins and pictures, her image may be even more varied than that of the flower. He may have seen her sitting in solemn state on the throne, with the crown on her head, or driving with cheerful countenance, in a simple bonnet in the park, or talking and laughing in a ball-dress in her own palace; and her image may occur to him with any of these varieties of expression and accompaniment: while the primrose, never, perhaps, having been seen by him, except on a grassy bank, may always present



itself to his mind in that single aspect ; and certainly the difference between one primrose and another is never equal to that between the same human countenance under different expressions of feeling.

When the common name belongs to objects of a more complex and diversified character, the range of images that may be called up is much wider. Take the word man, for example. When that common name is used, the image of any man we have ever seen may come into the mind, or an image made up of parts put together without our consciousness, and forming a combination we never actually saw ; and if we have time to dwell on the word, multitudinous images may be suggested in succession.

Just as a painter, if asked to draw the human figure, might, without premeditation, sketch a form which, in many particulars, would be unlike any he had before either seen or imagined,—so we are all of us apt to have novel forms (novel as to composition, but not as to component parts) constantly conjured up before us by the power of language, or by other instruments of association.

It appears, then, from this analysis, that no essential difference exists between what passes in the mind when proper names are heard, and when general names are heard. The peculiar feature, in the latter case, may be stated to be, that there is possibly and frequently, but not necessarily, a

greater range in the mental representations called up by any single appellation ; still there is nothing but an individual image, or a group or a succession of individual images or representations passing through the mind. It must be obvious, on reflection, that this is, in truth, the only possible effect of general terms. We rank individual objects under a common name on account of their resemblance to each other in one or more respects ; and when we use such an appellation, the utmost which the nature of the case allows us to do, whether the name has been imposed by ourselves or others, is to recall to our own minds, or to those of our hearers, the whole of the single objects thus classed together. This is an extreme case, which, no doubt, may happen ; but the result is usually far short of such a complete ideal muster, and we recall only a very inconsiderable part, or even sometimes only one, of the objects covered by the general term. It also appears that, if the ideas thus raised up are sometimes vague and indefinite, the same qualities frequently characterise the ideas raised up by proper names, and attend even the perception of external objects. So far as we have proceeded, indeed, nothing has been found in our ideas of things without us, but what has its exact counterpart in the actual perception of objects.

Before concluding my present Letter, I will briefly glance at a large division of general names which deserve especial notice, from their not denoting a

class of objects in the usual sense of that term, like the words man, tree, horse, star; but assuming a sort of identity, by no means real, in the things to which they are applied. The terms light, heat, air, oxygen, hydrogen, silver, gold, exemplify my meaning; in which instances the words are not the names of classes as ordinarily understood, nor yet of collective wholes, but of substances, wherever and in whatever quantity found, possessing certain definite qualities.

These words are, nevertheless, in effect, the names of classes. As what you predicate of a class may be predicated of any individual member of it, so what you predicate of one of these substances is predicable of every portion of it. Gold, for instance, is describable as being yellow, and possessing a certain specific gravity; *i. e.*, any portion of gold has these properties, just as every man has head, trunk, and limbs. There is, to be sure, this difference, that every man is a circumscribed organised being constituting an individual whole, which is destroyed when a certain separation of parts takes place; while every portion of gold, even the minutest, possesses all the properties on account of which the name is bestowed.

For the purpose I have in view, however, this distinction is of no importance. Just as the word man brings before the mind some individual image of humanity, so the word gold raises up the idea

of some piece of gold—some portion of the metal, or some article composed of it.

The same remark may be usefully made respecting the important and very comprehensive general term matter, which is the common name of everything perceived through the organs of sight and touch, not to speak of other organs. When you happen to be thinking about matter with any clearness and distinctness you have in your mental view some particular form of matter, some individual substance formerly observed through one or more of your bodily organs, or perhaps you have a long array of such individual substances in succession. Such is all that definite and precise thinking can possibly yield.

## LETTER XXIII.

## ABSTRACT TERMS.

WE next come to the consideration of what passes in the mind when abstract terms are used ; and this, I may venture to say, is a part of the subject that will repay the close attention which it unavoidably requires.

By abstract terms, which should be carefully distinguished from general names, I mean those which do not designate any object or event, or any class of objects and events, but an attribute or quality belonging to them, and which are capable of standing grammatically detached, without being joined to other terms: such are the words roundness, swiftness, length, innocence, equity, health, whiteness.

On reflecting upon what passes in my own consciousness when such terms are used, I find that I think of some object possessing the quality thus abstractly signified. When I hear the word "roundness," I think of a circle or a sphere. If any one talks of swiftness, I think of the flight of an arrow, or of an eagle cleaving the air, or a race-

horse, or an express railway-train in full career, or a flash of lightning; if he mentions whiteness, I think of the snow, or a swan, or a lily, or some other white object.

As a general name may call up a greater variety of images than a proper name, so may an abstract term. While the proper name St. Paul's Church raises a particular image, the common name circle may call up a circle of any size and any colour; and the abstract term roundness may bring to mind, not only a circle of any size and any colour, but the full moon, or a glass globe, or a diamond ring, or a cylindrical pillar, or all these objects in rapid succession.

If any one doubts that proper names, common names, and abstract terms, occasion essentially the same mental phenomena, and differ only in the possible range of images which they raise up, let him specify in precise language what it is that he thinks of, or what passes in his mind when such names and terms are employed.

To put this to the test, let us take three specimens of composition; one of which shall consist chiefly of Proper names, another of Common names, and the third of Abstract terms.

### 1. PROPER NAMES.

“ Amongst the company assembled on the occasion in St. James's Palace, we noticed Her Majesty

the Queen, Prince Albert, the Duchess of Kent, the Duke of Cambridge, the Duke of Wellington, the Marquis of Lansdowne, Lord John Russell, and Lord Palmerston."

(I put down these names because the persons indicated are generally known.)

## 2. COMMON NAMES.

"The China roses, in full bloom, adorned both sides of the cottage-door; beans and peas were blossoming in the garden, the borders of which were gay with pinks and gilliflowers, mingling their rich fragrance with that of a hedge of sweet-briar. The thrush and the blackbird were singing in the neighbouring coppice; and overhead the skylark, although to the sight only 'a dusky atom fluttering in the sky,' seemed to the ear a fountain of melody."

## 3. ABSTRACT TERMS.

"The swiftness with which the news circulated through the half-starved community was surpassed only by the eagerness with which every particular was received, and by the joy which it diffused through the abodes of poverty. Even Disease raised its languid eyes in momentary forgetfulness of its sufferings, and Age was won back to an interest in life."

I will venture to say, that if any one reads over

these three passages with deliberation, the scenes which will be brought before his mind by the last of them will be, if not as distinct and lively and rapidly suggested as those brought by either of the others, yet essentially of the same character, *i. e.*, made up of individual objects. Suppose the paragraph to have been written from personal observation, it is perfectly clear that the writer must have had particular scenes in his mind ; and such will spring up in the mind of the reader. It is true that abstract terms appear to require more effort on the part of the reader or hearer, and usually bring before us slight and ill-defined conceptions ; but this constitutes no essential distinction, as it is also the case (perhaps less frequently) with words of all kinds, as before explained, when rapidly read or when that rapid reading is listened to. The best way of ascertaining the real power of the words, is to consider the effect they have when we deliberately think of what they denote.

The greater effort required, and the more indefinite conceptions produced, by abstract terms warn the poet to introduce them sparingly into his verses. It is in this way, and not by any specific difference in the ideas raised up, that they tend to impair the lightness and liveliness of composition.

Dr. Johnson's addiction to them is manifest in almost every page of his works ; and hence the general heaviness of his poetry, notwithstanding its acknowledged vigour.



An example presents itself at the very opening of "The Vanity of Human Wishes."

"Let observation, with extensive view,  
Survey mankind from China to Peru ;  
Remark each anxious toil, each eager strife,  
And watch the busy scenes of crowded life ;  
Then say how hope and fear, desire and hate,  
O'erspread with snares the clouded maze of fate."

The first line, it may be noted by the way, is a remarkable example of that verbal amplification which adds not a jot of meaning to what is connected with it. Strike it out and you leave the sense altogether unimpaired, and of course more forcibly expressed.

A still more conspicuous instance of abstract language occurs in his Prologue spoken by Garrick at the opening of Drury Lane Theatre in 1747.

"When Learning's triumph o'er her barbarous foes  
First rear'd the stage, immortal Shakspeare rose ;  
Each change of many-colour'd life he drew,  
Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new :  
Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,  
And panting Time toil'd after him in vain.  
His powerful strokes presiding Truth impress'd,  
And unresisted Passion storm'd the breast."

I scarcely need say that general language has degrees of generality, and that the more particular it is the more it approaches the promptness of suggestion in which proper names must be allowed for the most part to possess the superiority.

Sterne was perfectly right when he took a single

captive that he might most powerfully affect his readers with the miseries of imprisonment. By so doing he did all that descriptive language could accomplish.

Although it is truly wonderful with what faint and undefined representations of things we can understand a long discourse, abounding perhaps in abstract and complex terms, even when impetuously delivered, this is analogous to our recognition of individual persons when rapidly passing before us, or when their names are rapidly read over to us, and is really not more marvellous than what we may remark in the velocity of our own spontaneous thoughts when we fall into a reverie or train of reflection or a dream, in which words have little or no share. The exceedingly slight touch-and-go manner, if I may so express it, in which the mind on these occasions passes with lightning speed through a thousand thoughts and yet with a separate comprehension of each, outrivals the instantaneous operation of the electric telegraph itself.

It is not necessary for my present purpose to examine the paradox that words are sometimes understood without exciting any conception at all of what they stand for. I believe the doctrine to be erroneous and to have arisen, like the dogma of abstract ideas, from an inadequate appreciation of the wonderful rapidity of thought and the sufficiency of the slightest retrospective consciousness.

In an ingenious speculation by Dr. Campbell, founded on passages in Berkeley and Hume, it is maintained that words gradually contract in our apprehension the same relations to each other as the things which they signify have amongst themselves. To express it in his own language, "the sounds considered as signs will be conceived to have a connexion analogous to that which subsisteth among the things signified." \*

Hence, if any one should enunciate a self-contradictory assertion, "the custom which we have acquired of attributing certain relations to ideas (I borrow the language of Hume) still follows the words, and makes us immediately perceive the absurdity of that proposition." "Immediately," adds Dr. Campbell; "that is, before we have leisure to give that attention to the signs which is necessary in order to form a just conception of the things signified."

Ingenious as the theory of these philosophers is, it will perhaps be found, on examination, rather plausible than solid. Familiar words are, it appears to me, so indissolubly united or rather so identified, with the things they denote, that I doubt whether they can be separated in general from their meaning, such as it happens in any mind to be, even for a moment, except from an imperfection of memory, which is not here in question: and, moreover, the relations spoken of are themselves

\* Philosophy of Rhetoric, book 2. chap. 2.

facts that can belong to or be true of nothing but things; and if the relations can be brought to mind by the words, the things themselves might be so too, or, to speak more correctly, must be so.

If the theory had limited itself to asserting that words might contract the power of exciting the same emotions as the objects they signify, it would have been less disputable.

But whether this speculation is accurate or not, it is needless for me to inquire. Whatever it is that passes in the mind when articulate sounds are heard, or their visible signs are read, we may be satisfied that it is the same kind of phenomenon or event in all cases,—at least where there is the same rapidity of utterance, or of visual perusal,—whether the words are proper names, common names, or abstract terms; and this is all that the purpose I have in view requires me to show.

In a word, we can think only of particular objects and events, although with more or less distinctness, whether language is or is not the medium of bringing them to mind, and whatever is the grammatical character of the words employed; that is to say, we can have only particular ideas or conceptions. I am unable myself, I confess, to attain to a clear understanding of what is meant by any other kind of ideas.

It has indeed been maintained by eminent philosophers — as I have already had occasion to notice — that we form in our minds what they term

abstract notions corresponding to the abstract terms employed in speaking or writing; but they have not been hitherto successful in their attempts to show what an abstract notion is. On closely analysing what passes in my own mind, I do not discover that I can think of anything but particular objects and events, either apart or combined, single or numerous, with various degrees of distinctness and completeness. In this personal experience I am happy to find myself supported by Berkeley, from whom I so often differ, in a passage in which, it is to be observed, he speaks indiscriminately of common names and abstract terms.

“Whether others,” says he, “have this wonderful faculty of abstracting their ideas they best can tell; for myself I find indeed I have a faculty of imagining or representing to myself the ideas of those particular things I have perceived, and of variously compounding and dividing them. I can imagine a man with two heads, or the upper parts of a man joined to the body of a horse. I can consider the hand, the eye, the nose, each by itself abstracted or separated from the rest of the body. But then, whatever hand or eye I imagine, it must have some particular shape and colour. Likewise the idea of man that I frame to myself, must be either of a white or a black or a tawny, a straight or a crooked, a tall or a low or a middle-sized man. I cannot by any effort of thought conceive the abstract idea above described. And it is

equally impossible for me to form the abstract idea of motion distinct from the body moving, and which is neither swift nor slow, curvilinear nor rectilinear; and the like may be said of all other abstract general ideas whatsoever. To be plain, I own myself able to abstract in one sense, as when I consider some particular parts and qualities separated from others with which, though they are united in some object, yet it is possible they may really exist without them. But I deny that I can abstract one from another, or conceive separately those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated; or that I can frame a general notion by abstracting from particulars in the manner aforesaid." \*

What has been here said of general and abstract terms applies in substance to words of a complex and collective character, such as government, society, civilisation, the age, the church, the army. These are often very abbreviated expressions of many different objects and events; some of them having so wide a meaning that a chapter might be required to draw it out in detail.

They, nevertheless, resemble such general and abstract terms as I have considered in the circumstance which I have had particularly in view: whatever images or ideas they raise up, however numerous or complicated they may be, are separable

\* Of the Principles of Human Knowledge. Introduction, sect. 10.

into individual parts or elements corresponding to objects formerly perceived ; and consist of nothing else than the representations of such objects, single, or in groups, or in sequences. Like general and abstract language, these terms raise up only representative ideas ; and, like them, they often raise up such as are very obscure, vacillating, and indistinct. All these terms, it may be added, or perhaps more properly their significations, are apt to be personified, like the faculties or operations of the mind, and to be treated in speculation as if they were substantive and independent agents. Hence arises, as in the other case, the invention of multitudes of fictitious incidents and operations, which conceal ignorance and satisfy mankind with the semblance of knowledge. This is a subject, however, which, to have justice done to it, would require a treatise to itself.

## LETTER XXIV.

## ABSTRACT TERMS, CONTINUED.

I HAVE to thank you most cordially for your comments on my two last Letters, and will here quote one passage from them for the sake of the explanation which it has suggested to me.

“ Well,” says the passage in question, “ granting you have proved that abstract terms call up nothing but particular images or representations, this applies only to the power of language. May there not be ideas which rise up in the mind independently of words? Language is an after matter. The objects or events designated by our terms must exist before the terms are applied to them, and the real question is, ‘are not such abstract ideas engendered before words can have anything to do with the process?’”

To this I reply, in the first place, that of such ideas I, for my own part, am not conscious; being so constituted as to think of nothing but particular objects and events, or, in other words, to have none but particular ideas, either single, or in groups, or sequences; and, in the second place, that since the



abstract ideas, the existence of which is maintained have been specifically endowed with names, it is of no consequence whether the question is stated in connection with language or not. It may be put in either of two forms: "Are there such things as abstract ideas recalled to the mind by abstract terms?" or, "Are there such things as abstract ideas originally engendered in the mind, and subsequently matched with separate and peculiar appellations?" In either case an answer in the affirmative asserts the actual existence of a mental phenomenon, called an abstract idea, of a non-representative character; and it is this alleged mental phenomenon of which with Berkeley I profess myself to be wholly unconscious. No theorist, as far as I am aware (I speak doubtingly on account of the strange metaphysical speculations which at one time or other have appeared), ever supposed that the abstract ideas which he alleges to exist were originally begotten by the terms employed to denote them; he must admit that they were first engendered and then named.

The subject as stated in the first question I have already examined; let us consider it again as stated in the second. Fortunately for my purpose, I find that to this second question several eminent philosophers have in the most express terms returned an affirmative answer. Mr. Dugald Stewart may be selected as having given as lucid an exposition of that opinion as any other writer.

In criticising his great predecessor Locke, Mr. Stewart maintains that there are certain simple ideas or familiar notions, "which relate to things bearing no resemblance either to any of the sensible qualities of matter, or to any mental operation which is the direct object of consciousness; which notions, therefore (although the senses may furnish the *first occasions* on which they occur to the understanding), can neither be referred to sensation nor to reflection as their *fountains* or *sources*, in the acceptation in which these words are employed by Locke." \*

As instances of the notions which he thus vaguely describes, he mentions causation, time, number, truth, certainty, probability, extension; and he cites a passage from Dr. Hutcheson to the same effect as evincing singular acuteness. "Extension, figure, motion, and rest," says the latter writer, "seem to be more properly ideas accompanying the sensations of sight and touch, than the sensations of either of those senses." It is curious enough how Mr. Stewart failed to discern, as he apparently did, that the ideas which he here calls simple are what other philosophers term abstract, and while he considers them as brought into existence on occasion of sensation they regard them as subsequently abstracted from our parti-

\* Philosophical Essays, third edition, p. 102.

cular ideas. "The same colour," says Locke, "being observed to-day in chalk or snow which the mind yesterday received from milk, it considers that appearance alone, makes it a representative of all of that kind; and having given it the name whiteness, it by that sound signifies the same quality wheresoever to be imagined or met with: and thus universals, whether ideas or terms, are made."\*

Locke, however, it may be remarked in passing, like many other philosophers, does not observe the useful distinction between common names or general concrete words, and abstract terms; and he, as well as others, sometimes designates what the latter terms denote, by the appellation "*simple ideas*."

Mr. Stewart's doctrine is essentially the assertion of non-representative, in addition to representative, ideas; it maintains that, besides having in our minds copies, as they are called, of what we have perceived and felt, we are conscious of intellectual phenomena which are purely original—not copies or representations of anything else, but coming into independent existence on occasion of our perceiving external objects.

Thus, when we first direct our eyes upon an extended body, we not only, according to Mr. Stewart, see it or have a perception of it, but we have at the same time an idea perfectly distinct

\* Essay on Human Understanding, book 2. chap. 11.

from the perception, and relating to *things which bear no resemblance to the sensible qualities of the extended body.*

What can these things possibly be ?

Let us try what we can make of all this by an example.

Take a tree for the purpose. When we open our eyes upon it, we observe that it is extended, definitely shaped, with numerous branches and leaves waving in the breeze. All these in common apprehension are things perceived through the organs of sight. But Mr. Stewart, who, I presume, may be considered as admitting this, teaches that while we thus perceive the tree to be extended, figured, presenting multitudinous parts, and moving in the wind, we simultaneously become conscious of the ideas of extension, figure, number, and motion. To confine ourselves, for the sake of clearness, to a single attribute, we have at once the perception of the tree as extended, and the idea of extension; and if, by closing our eyes, we convert the perception into an idea of the tree, we shall be conscious of two ideas—the representative idea of an extended object, and the non-representative idea of extension.

This account of what takes place is even less plausible than that of the philosophers who consider such terms as extension, motion, and the rest to denote ideas formed by abstraction from the attributes of objects previously perceived, and bearing a relation to them.

The two hypotheses, if they may be so styled, are, however, substantially the same, and may be met by the same answer — that we are not conscious of the alleged simple or abstract ideas — that there is nothing corresponding to their names in our minds.

The question resolves itself, in fact, into the one considered in my last Letter.

In whatever way the alleged ideas may be said to originate, their names, or the abstract terms so abundant in speech, must bring them to mind, if they actually exist.

Now, my doctrine is, that as we are unable to perceive, so we are unable to conceive any separate entity corresponding to an abstract term: nor are we conscious of any peculiar mental phenomenon to which that term can be applied. In different language, we have no ideas in the mind answering to such words as extension and motion, but, when they are used, we think of an extended and moving body. Our thoughts on such occasions may frequently be vague, shadowy, indistinct, and fugitive, but their real character is what I have described it to be. Try to think clearly and deliberately of extension, and you will find yourself thinking of some extended substance: try to think clearly and deliberately of motion, and you will find yourself thinking of some moving body.

It is somewhat singular that Mr. Stewart (who was a decided nominalist, and considered that com-

mon names and other general terms do not denote general ideas; that all which is general in the case, lies in the words) should yet maintain that we have ideas corresponding to such general abstract terms as extension, motion, causation, truth, certainty, and the rest. As a nominalist, he would hold that the common name *extended substance* does not denote a substance without particular qualities, nor raise up an idea of such a substance, but recalls one or more particular substances formerly perceived through the organs of sense; and yet he considers the general abstract term *extension* as having a corresponding abstract, or, as he denominates it, simple idea in the mind, or as being the name of such an idea.

He manifestly either was not aware that his "simple ideas" are what others denominate abstract, or did not discern the relation between common names and abstract terms, and that any proposition composed of the latter may be completely expressed in concrete language.

If there are such abstract ideas as he contends for, what becomes of them when their names, as they always may be, are replaced by concrete general terms which fully convey the same meaning, and which he himself maintains, raise up ideas only of particular objects?

The singular attempt of these philosophers to distinguish between what we perceive, and ideas of a non-representative character springing up in the

mind on occasion of perception, was probably owing in part to the habit of regarding the senses as distinct from the mind, and as in themselves unintelligent transmitters to the understanding of information from without, instead of considering the mind just as directly engaged in perceiving objects through the organs of sense as in recollecting, discerning, or reasoning, when the senses are not in activity. They are alike states or modifications of consciousness. Extended substances, figured objects, causes producing effects, bodies moving or resting, are all perceived through these organs; and when they have passed away, or are withdrawn, the mind has or may have ideas of them, but it can have no other ideas relating to material external existences than those which represent such things as have been perceived. Perceiving is the grand original mental operation on which, as far as the material world is concerned, conceiving is altogether dependent, and by which it is rigidly circumscribed. In different language, all our ideas are of a representative character, and cannot be otherwise.

In illustration of the truth that we have no ideas relating to external material things which have not originated in perception, or which are additional to the ideas representing what we have perceived, I venture to assert that there is nothing we can think of regarding external objects, no form into which we can throw our ideas, which we could not

perceive were the objects actually before us : or, in other words, we can have no ideas whatever of external objects, or relating to them, of which the counterparts could not be perceived through the organs of sense, were the objects in presence.

We can, it is true, form in our minds the conception of an object that we have never seen, as is exemplified in the common instance of a golden mountain ; but if such an object were set before us, there would be no more difficulty in seeing it than there actually is in conceiving it. The elements out of which the conception was put together — gold and a common mountain — were originally perceived through the eye ; and in what way soever such elements are combined in imagination, to the eye they would be perceptible, could a corresponding combination of realities be brought before it.



## LETTER XXV.

EXAMPLES OF IMPORTANT GENERAL AND ABSTRACT  
TERMS.

THE importance of forming a just and clear conception of what passes in the mind when common names and abstract terms are employed, can scarcely be overrated.

It is not going too far to say, that a complete mastery of this part of mental philosophy furnishes a key for most of the difficulties besetting the subject, and throws a powerful light on all speculation whatever. It will be found an invaluable guide through the bewildering mazes of mystical metaphysics. In proof of these assertions, I shall select a few important phrases for examination.

I will draw your attention, in the first place, to the names of those mental phenomena which have occupied so much space in the present series of Letters.

The appellations under which we are accustomed to group the operations and affections of the mind, are nothing but general terms or common denominations. We call one kind of mental action —

one mode of consciousness — perception ; another, recollection, and so on ; but it must be kept in view that every act of perception is individual, and, however close in resemblance, is different in identity from every other act, just as one pebble on the sea-shore, or one wave that dashes over it, is different in identity from all other pebbles or all other waves.

When, therefore, we make use of the words sensation, perception, and recollection, and speak of other operations and affections of the mind, our language indicates the agreement or resemblance between individual mental acts or individual phenomena of consciousness ; and these terms are significant only by raising up in ourselves and others ideas representative of such particular phenomena.

In the whole range of language, perhaps, no word has produced greater perplexity, or at least greater diversity of view, than my next instance—the word cause. After the preceding discussions a little consideration is sufficient to enable us to discern that this word is a common name — the common name of a vast variety of objects and events. We give less general names to the objects and events around us, and include the whole in this great general name.

Thus, the expressions — the sun's rays have blanced the blue curtains, the falling of the chimney killed a man who was walking in the street, the dew has drenched the grass, "those

evening bells" filled me with melancholy emotions — may be converted into others in which the term cause, either as verb or noun, may be introduced to express the same meaning. For example, "the sun's rays have caused the blue curtains to lose their colour," "the falling of the chimney was the cause of the man's death," and so on.

In a similar light, we must regard such expressions as — the wind shakes the trees, fire consumes wood, water drowns land animals, and a thousand others. Shaking, consuming, and drowning, denote so many ways of producing effects, so many modes in which causes operate, so many successions of events.

Or, if you wish for more scientific examples, which are in fact not a whit better than the homeliest and most familiar, take the cases of the electric spark uniting oxygen and hydrogen into water, the moon's attraction raising tides in the ocean, the voltaic battery decomposing soda and potass, the act of breathing producing animal heat. We live amidst the movements of matter, and every change preceding another, as in these cases, is generalised under the name of cause when experience has not shown the sequence to be casual or inconstant.

What I particularly wish to impress on your mind is, that the word cause, like all other general terms, can do no more than bring before our minds some particular instance, such as fire burn-

ing wood, water turning a wheel, the collision of two bodies producing sound, words awakening recollections in the mind; which instances when described are indeed themselves expressed in general language, but less general than the term cause; and when either the more or the less general of these expressions is deliberately considered, a particular picture or representation, however faint, presents itself to us.

If we attempt to go beyond such particular instances, in order to form, as it is usually expressed, the general idea of a cause, we shall be inevitably baffled. We can find only individual cases exhibiting the circumstance common to all, or, to speak more accurately, in which they resemble each other. We may indeed detect or imagine intervening events between any assigned cause and effect, but even if such events can be discovered, the only result will be an addition to the number of things we designate as causes. We shall still come to some thing acting upon another, or some event preceding another; and if we think clearly on the matter, we shall have in our minds the representation of some particular instance of such physical action or consecutive events, or we shall mentally glance over a number of such instances. As, when we think of a triangle, we must think either of an acute-angled, a right-angled, or an obtuse-angled triangle, or of two or more of them in succession; and not, as Locke contends, of a triangle which is none of these :

so when we think of a cause, we must think of some particular event preceding some other particular event, and not of some entity or occurrence which is divested of all particular features.

Those who, like M. Comte, object to designate events as causes, are objecting without any real ground to a mere but extremely convenient generalisation, to a very useful common name; the employment of which involves, or needs involve, no particular theory.

The common name — cause — naturally leads to the consideration of its abstract derivative. The word causation, or (if I may use the term) causingness, or power, will serve to introduce the further elucidation of abstract terms as distinguished from general concrete terms, or common names.

When the word power or causingness is employed, it raises in the mind, like the word cause, the thought of some particular succession of events, or several sequences in turn, and not the thought of something separate from the events.

Hume, following out his doctrine of impressions and ideas, which is in many respects the same as Locke's, and points to an important truth, although expressed in objectionable language, puzzled himself very ingeniously on this subject. He remarks (incorrectly, I think) that all events seem loose and separate; we can never, he proceeds to say, observe any tie between them. "As we can have no idea," he continues, of anything which never

appeared to our outward sense or inward sentiment, the necessary conclusion *seems* to be that we can have no idea of connexion or power at all." And he gets out of the difficulty by supposing that the customary transition of the mind from one object or event to the other, is the sentiment or impression required by his theory, and of which the idea of power is the copy; failing to see the true and simple solution that *power* is nothing but an abstract term, not needing a separate impression to be assigned to it. It is obvious, also, to remark, in consonance with his own theory, that when we actually *see* a cause producing an effect (as, for example, fire consuming wood), there is no *idea* concerned at all; we have a perception, or what he calls an impression, through the organ of sight. And when, the event being past, we think of it, the idea will correspond to the impression; *i. e.* we shall think of the event just as it visibly occurred. Whatever of causation there is in the occurrence, is a matter of direct perception through the organs of sense; and it is only afterwards that it becomes an idea. But the idea to be accurate can change nothing in what we had perceived. We may doubtless feel wonder, or delight, or awe, or other emotions, and we may form a hundred suppositions or inferences that there is something underlying what we discern; and this unknown, vague, and shadowy something we may call power. In proportion, nevertheless, as such a supposition as-

sumes a distinct form, it will be found to be made up of representative ideas.

Hume's remark, already quoted, that all events appear loose and separate, and that we can observe no *tie* between them, deserves also to be particularly noticed as exceedingly curious. What closer connexion can there be, either in fact or in conception, than that which exists between putting a piece of paper into a flame, and its being consumed ? And what sort of tie between two events of this kind could he possibly have in contemplation ?

Looseness and separateness in things imply that there is between them either an interval of space or an interval of time. But there is manifestly no perceptible interval of space between the flame and the paper, for one is thrust into the other ; and there is no appreciable interval of time, for the burning instantly begins.

Where, then, in such cases is there place for any *tie* ? And what can the term so employed possibly denote ?

Hume, with all his metaphysical acuteness, was here, I suspect, using words without meaning ; furnishing an example how easy it is to fall into null or nugatory assertions, when we are so occupied with general terms and propositions as to neglect constant and distinct reference to particular cases.

Perhaps the most remarkable abstract terms,

which it is possible to adduce, are the words which I have just had occasion to use in their popular acceptation — time and space. It may not be at first admitted that these words come under that designation, but a little reflection will, I think, satisfy you, and every other reader, that they are nothing more and nothing less than what I have denominated them.

In regard to time, when that word is employed we think of some object, or of some thought or feeling, that *lasts* or *dures*; or, perhaps, we think of a succession of events. A succession of events, nevertheless, is not essential, since every one in the series *dures*. Nothing can exist at all, whether material or mental, without lasting.

Time is the abstract term which denotes this *lasting* or *during*, just as brightness is the abstract term denoting the quality of being bright. As there is no separate entity represented by the term brightness, so there is none represented by the term *time* or *duringness*.

The word space is, more obviously even than the word time, an abstract term.

It denotes the quality of being extended, and might indeed be replaced by the word *extendedness*.\* It can do nothing beyond raising up in the mind the image or conception of an extended object.

\* I use the barbarous words *duringness* and *extendedness* to show the analogy of their equivalents *time* and *space* to such terms as steadfastness and brightness.



There is no separate entity represented by the word space or extendedness, any more than by the word brilliancy or brightness.

This may appear inconsistent with the common notions of infinite space and empty space.

By infinite space, however, nothing can be signified but objects indefinitely extended. We can think of no limit being placed to extended objects, because any limit we could think of would be itself extended.

In regard to empty space, the explanation may not appear so obvious. The phrase, however, is really unmeaning, or contains a self-contradiction; and it may be added that we practically know no such thing, the most perfect vacuum we can make being still pervaded by heat, if by nothing else.

Should it be said that, when we have before us a block of granite, we can think of the body itself and the space which it occupies, and which would remain were the granite to be annihilated; it may be replied that, in point of fact, the annihilation of the granite, is as far as our experience extends, a physical impossibility, and were it possible, would not leave an empty space or absolute vacuum; nor can we conceive one. While the granite exists, nothing else exists (to speak in ordinary language) in the same place; if it were annihilated, either something would take its place, or there would ensue the contradiction of an extended nothing. The phrase occupying space means neither more

nor less than being extended ; and it is impossible for us to conceive what being extended means but by thinking of an extended object. Speaking of an absolutely empty space is equivalent to speaking of extendedness as existing without anything that is extended — an extended non-entity. I may add that, to support my doctrine regarding the impossibility of conceiving an empty space, I may adduce the authority of both Berkeley \* and Hume. †

I may also cite the prior authority of Descartes, not only against the possibility of conceiving empty space, but against the possibility of its existence. He declares “that a vacuum or space in which there is absolutely no body is repugnant to reason.”

“With regard to a vacuum,” he continues, “in the philosophical sense of the term—that is, a space in which there is no substance—it is evident that such does not exist, seeing the extension of space or internal place is not different from that of body. For since from this alone, that a body has extension in length, breadth, and depth, we have reason to conclude that it is a substance, *it being absolutely contradictory that nothing should possess extension*, we ought to form a similar inference regarding the space which is supposed void—viz. that since there is extension in it, there is necessarily also substance.” ‡

\* Principles of Human Knowledge, sect. 116.

† Life by Burton, vol. 1. p. 74. ; and Treatise on Human Nature, vol. 1, pp. 68. 86.

‡ The Principles of Philosophy, part 2. English translation, 1853.

In noticing on a former occasion the doctrines maintained by the renowned German philosopher Kant respecting the external word, I purposely kept out of sight his extraordinary positions respecting time and space, till I had explained my own views regarding them.

On these subjects, if he did not puzzle himself, but only carried out his doctrines to their legitimate consequences, he certainly both startled and perplexed his readers, by contending that time and space are only forms of thought, or modifications of our sensible intuition, and would perish with the extinction of mind.

When properly viewed, the question, as I have just endeavoured to show, is a very simple one: time and space are nothing more than abstract terms denoting no separate entities, either physical or mental, but simply the qualities of duringness and extendedness in objects; just as brightness is an abstract term signifying no distinct entity, but a quality in certain bodies not detachable from them. Perceiving objects in time and space, according to the common phrase, simply means that we perceive them *dure*, and that we perceive them to be extended, in the same way as we see them to be bright.

The being extended, and the during or lasting, are inseparable constituents or essential attributes of the object; and as to "forms of thought," the perception of the object, with these attributes and

the subsequent conception of it, are the only forms of thought in the whole business.

This, however, does not at all correspond with Kant's views. According to his doctrine, if there were no mind in existence (although objects styled transcendental in his vocabulary must, it is presumed, continue to exist), there would be no time and no space, these being forms of the mind itself (whatever that may mean), or forms which in some inconceivable way it casts over its own perceptions.

My doctrine, on the other hand, leads to the position that even on the supposition of all minds being extinguished, and all abstract terms with them, there would still be things which *last*, and things which are *extended*. To the existence of these the extinction of intelligence would make no difference.

Kant's extravagant doctrine on this subject is undoubtedly a necessary consequence of one of the modes already noticed, in which he speaks of the perception of outward objects.

He terms these perceived objects mere phenomena, and also (as if he regarded the two phrases as equivalent) mere modifications of our sensible intuition. Referring to the rainbow, he says:—"Not only are these drops mere phenomena, but their round form itself, nay, indeed, the very space in which they fall, are nothing, in themselves, but mere modifications or principles of our sensible intui-

tion; the transcendental object, however, remains unknown to us."\*

It is perfectly clear that if, as here taught, external objects are nothing but modifications of our sensible intuition,—that is of our consciousness in perception,—the attributes of being extended and of during which constitute so essential a part of all visible and tangible entities,—or, in common language, space and time,—must also be mere mental modifications, and perish with the minds of which they are only forms.

What surprises me is, that when Kant was very logically landed in this absurd conclusion from his own premises, he was not led to suspect some radical error in his method of dealing with the subject: and it is also surprising that he did not discern how inconsistent the doctrine that space and time are mere forms of thought, or modifications of consciousness in the percipient, is with the hypothesis of an unknown transcendental object.

For this transcendental object, being unperceived, could not be invested with these or any other forms of thought (to speak in the Kantian dialect), and must consequently be without extension and without duration; *i. e.* could exist, according to the ordinary phrase, neither in space nor in time; which is very much like being nowhere, or not existing at all. A want of clear and correct views

\* Critick of Pure Reason, p. 48.

of the true nature of abstract terms appears to me to manifest itself not only here, but in the construction of his whole elaborately erroneous system.

Similar observations to those I have laid before you respecting space and time, might be made with regard to the terms life, motion, force, truth, and many others, when employed abstractedly. When these words are used we think of a living body, a moving substance, a true proposition, and so forth. Life, and motion, and truth denote no separate entities, but they are exceedingly convenient modes of speech.

I might go on adducing illustrations from all departments of knowledge; but it would be a superfluous labour, which you and every other reader can readily perform for yourselves.

I am aware that all the positions of this chapter will be keenly contested, and my only desire is that they may be maturely considered before they are controverted.

Philosophers (except the followers of Kant, whose view of the matter is, as I have shown, totally different from mine) are not prepared to give up space and time, and the rest of these abstractions, as distinct existences; or, if they stop short of what this implies, they will still be ready to maintain that there are distinct ideas in the mind corresponding to the abstract terms employed.

Lest you should be startled by some of the con-

clusions to which these speculations appear to lead, I must warn you not to overlook the facts that thinking is not only exceedingly rapid and volatile, but that it is accompanied by feeling, and that although we have no abstract ideas corresponding to abstract terms, and no ideas at all but such as are representative, yet that these may be thrown into endless combinations, which may be attended by emotions the most varied in character and intensity. Mental affections of any kind, although perfectly distinguishable from the rest of their class, seldom if ever take place without the concomitance of others, either sensitive or intellectual, or both.

In thinking, for example, of suns and stars indefinitely multiplied in our conception through the fields of ether, we can have in our minds ideas of only particular objects, however multitudinous they may be; but we may feel at the same time deep awe and admiration at such an illimitable array of magnificent luminaries, a swelling elevation of sentiment at the boundless extent of the universe, and a profound veneration for the Great Being to whom we ascribe the whole.

Such feelings doubtless operate to confer a sort of illusive reality or separate existence on the import of abstract terms such as space and infinity, and render it difficult to form a clear estimate of what is actually conceived; but they do not at all change the real character of our conceptions.

Further, we may draw innumerable inferences, of the most important alike and of the most trivial nature, as well as picture to ourselves imaginary scenes and events of endless variety: but as the finest strains of melody and harmony resolve themselves, when analysed, into a few musical notes, and the richest outpourings of the poet and the orator into a few articulate sounds, so, whatever we can imagine or infer, invent or conjecture, wild, grand, and awful as it may be, will be found to be made up of nothing but representative ideas.



## NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

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### NOTE A.—LETTER III.

THE following extracts on the subject of this Letter, and in support of its general views, will probably be welcome to the inquirer who wishes to see important questions exhibited in the peculiar lights of various minds, especially as some of the passages are from writings perhaps not readily accessible. The author scarcely needs to add that, in presenting them to his readers, he by no means adopts every opinion or every expression which they contain. The first is from a writer now seldom referred to: —

“According to this manner of considering power, it is absolutely contradictory to maintain the unity of the mind, and yet to suppose the existence of distinct intellectual faculties or powers. If the primary cause in one *series* be different from the primary cause in another, we cannot refer both these *series* to the same principle. If we trace an action to the will, a recollection to the memory, or a judgment to the understanding, how shall we pretend that there is yet a more remote principle? By what inference shall we conclude that the power of imagination is derived from anything else; or that the faculty of comprehension is the delegate of any superior intelligence? All these separate powers are primary causes; at least,

they are so to our understandings, if we can trace only to them any *series* of causes and effects. To say, then, that power is a primary, or creative, cause, is to admit that it is a principle, and in admitting it to be a principle, we must conclude against the unity of the human soul, while we continue to insist upon the existence of distinct mental powers." — *Academical Questions*, by Sir Wm. Drummond, p. 6.

The next extract is from a work of the celebrated Broussais, translated from the French, and published in the United States, by a gentleman who emigrated a long time ago from this country, where he is still remembered as the author of an able volume of Ethical and Political Tracts: —

"What we call attention, perception of external objects, perception of our own thought or consciousness, idea, judgment, reasoning, memory, are not specific faculties, separate entities inhabiting the brain, put into action by the impressions that proceed from the senses, or by some pretended internal force independent of them, as has been asserted of *le moi*, or of consciousness, and of the memory; they are no other than varieties of cerebral perception, which we may observe as facts or phenomena, but which we cannot venture to explain. Still less are we permitted to adopt the poetry of metaphysics, and to personify these varieties or modifications, for the purpose of explaining the superiority of one over the rest, or the influence they exercise one over another, as active principles; for we cannot do this without treating these phenomena as if they were bodies cognizable by the senses, with which, in fact, they have nothing to do, for they can resemble nothing but themselves." — *On Irritation and Insanity*, by F. J. V. Broussais, translated by Thomas Cooper, M.D., President of the South Carolina College, p. 133.

The views of Dr. Thomas Brown on this subject are well known, but the following short extract is too much to the purpose to be withheld: —

“ Still less, I trust, is it necessary to repeat the warning, already so often repeated, that you are not to conceive that any classification of the states or affections of the mind, as referable to certain powers or susceptibilities, makes these powers anything different or separate from the mind itself, as originally and essentially susceptible of the various modifications of which these powers are only a shorter name. And yet what innumerable controversies in philosophy have arisen, and are still frequently arising, from this very mistake, strange and absurd as the mistake may seem. No sooner, for example, were certain affections of the mind classed together as belonging to the *will*, and certain others as belonging to the *understanding* — that is to say, no sooner was the mind, existing in certain states denominated the understanding, and in certain other states denominated the will, than the understanding and the will ceased to be considered the same individual substance, and became immediately, as it were, two opposite and contending powers in the empire of mind, as distinct as any two sovereigns with their separate nations under their control; and it became an object of as fierce contention to determine whether certain affections of the mind belonged to the understanding or to the will, as, in the management of political affairs, to determine whether a disputed province belonged to one potentate or to another. Every new diversity of the faculties of the mind, indeed, converted each faculty into a little independent mind; as if the original mind were like that wonderful animal, of which naturalists tell us, that may be cut into an almost infinite number of parts, each of which becomes a polypus as perfect as that from which it was separated. The only difference is, that those who

make us acquainted with this wonderful property of the polypus, acknowledge the divisibility of the parent animal, while those who assert the spiritual multiplicity are at the same time assertors of the absolute indivisibility of that which they divide."—*Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, by Thomas Brown, M.D., vol. i., p. 365.

The three extracts which follow are from a writer manifestly more remarkable for acuteness than courtesy. They are, however, worth the attentive consideration of the student:—

"Their other instrument of proof is, also, an abuse of language; and a very copious source of error and delusion. They personify an abstract term, and then ascribe to it, literally, the qualities of an agent. This is in the way of the rhetorical Sir James. It is more surprising that Butler should have been deluded by so poor a fallacy.

"Our appetites, say they, have their objects, each its own, at which it aims as its end; our appetite of food, for example; our appetite of drink; the sexual appetite; and so of other propensities. None of these has the augmentation of the sum of our enjoyments as its object.

"Is it not miserable to build a philosophical doctrine upon such a juggle of words? Would not a moderate portion of reflection have sufficed to tell these men, that appetite is merely a name; that nothing really desires, or appetizes (to make a cognate word); nothing has an object or an end; nothing aims, but a man. And when a man aims at an object, and that a selfish one, is it not trifling to tell us, that it is his appetite which aims, and not he; therefore, he is disinterested?"—*A Fragment on Mackintosh*, p. 72.

"The next of Butler's two truths, panegyriized by Sir James, is, that conscience has a controlling power over man's other propensities.

“There is here the same mystery of personification as we have had to deal with in regard to the appetites.

“What a man’s conscience is said to do, the man does ; when the man’s conscience is said to control, the man controls. But how ridiculous would any person be held who should go about to tell us in lofty phrase that a man has a right to control himself?

“If it be replied, that the man *ought* to govern himself in a certain way, we grant it. Nobody denies it, or ever did. But we ask, *why* ought he? That question has long been asked. And surely it is no answer to tell us that conscience has a right to direct the way ; for that only brings us round to the same point, that the man has a right to direct the way.”—*A Fragment on Mackintosh*, p. 74.

“It is for the benefit of exemplifying strongly to the young the tendency of vague and circuitous language in philosophy, that there is any use in attending to Sir James. For that reason, we notice the two sentences which he gives us next. ‘*Conscience may forbid the will to contribute to the gratification of a desire. No desire ever forbids will to obey conscience.*’ All this personification of certain mental phenomena ; one phenomenon forbidding another phenomenon ; one phenomenon contributing to the gratification of another phenomenon ; a certain phenomenon never forbidding a certain phenomenon to obey a third phenomenon ; is, in itself, rank nonsense. And when you apply to it the only rational meaning of which it is susceptible, it is a trite, or rather nugatory observation ; neither more nor less than this, that it is sometimes immoral to obey a desire ; but it is never immoral to obey conscience in opposition to a desire ; which seems to come to this, that it is moral to act morally, immoral to act immorally. And this is the sum and substance of Sir James’s ‘theory.’”—*A Fragment on Mackintosh*, p. 118.

Sir G. C. Haughton, the author of the work from

which the next passages are taken, held very decided opinions, often well and instructively expressed, on the delusions of language; but he appears to me not to have completely mastered his own views, and he fell into some singular inconsistencies.

“The effect of Realism in our minds, in leading us to convert these airy nothings into entities, cannot be more plainly exhibited than in the universal use of them as faculties of the mind. Thus we speak of our Will, our Judgment, our Fancy, our Imagination, our Understanding, &c., as realities that form part of our intellect; though we can, in truth, only say that *we*, that is, our intellectual nature, wills, judges, fancies, imagines, understands, &c. But this subject is of too much importance to be more than alluded to here; and it will accordingly, be more appropriately considered hereafter.”—*Prodromus, or an Inquiry into the First Principles of Reasoning*, by Sir Graves Chauncy Haughton, p. 35.

“Of all the Faculties of the Mind, there being none so important as the *Understanding*, I commence with it. The first great delusion we are under, is in supposing that the word Understanding represents anything whatsoever. We, that is, our thinking selves, may *understand* what we hear or see; but when we employ the Abstract word Understanding, for some part of ourselves, we do so clearly by a fallacy. When we *understand* anything, we necessarily *feel*, *are conscious*, and *intelligent*: and were I to analyse the term Understanding according to the usual mode in these cases, I would consequently say, that it is compounded of Feeling, Consciousness, and Intelligence. For if I analyse one Abstraction, I shall most likely do it by the help of others; but, in reality, there is neither Understanding, Feeling, Consciousness, nor Intelligence; and, instead of these, we must remember that it is the union of soul with matter, which, being organized into human frames, *understands, feels, is conscious and intelligent*.

This, I think, is sufficiently obvious; and I now proceed to say the same of some other of the most remarkable of our Faculties.

“We talk of the Faculties we call Memory, Imagination, Judgment, Will, Attention, Reflection, &c.; but it is obvious we must do the same with these Abstractions as with the Understanding, and remember, that all we can truly say is, that we, our individual selves, can *remember*, imagine, judge, will, attend, reflect, &c., and nothing more. Consequently, the supposition of Faculties, upon which we so often draw, is a mere conventional form of speech; and, however expedient or inevitable this course is, we ought never to forget its real nature when we investigate such matters, otherwise we shall only delude ourselves, and mislead others. We call these Abstractions ‘Faculties,’ and ‘Powers,’ but it is only by a sort of figure of speech; and yet men go on gravely discussing the nature of these Faculties as realities of which there can be no doubt. We likewise forget that the words Faculty and Power are both Abstract Terms.” — *Ibid.*, p. 196.

After these very explicit declarations on the part of Sir Graves the reader is startled by the following extraordinary position:—

“Of all the divisions into which we separate ‘The Mind,’ *Reason* is the only one which is not a misconception arising from the delusive nature of language. It is not a Faculty, but a *real Agent*, aiding and assisting the Intellect of Man in all its varied operations. Upon what grounds I make this assertion must be deferred for the present; as it would not merely involve me in a disquisition of a length disproportioned to the other questions which I have selected for discussion, but because it will appear more appropriately hereafter, in connection with that to which it has never been suspected to be related: and all I have to say will, consequently,



then, be better understood than it could be in this place. In doing so, I do not ask the reader for any admission, but merely that he will suspend his judgment till I can produce all the evidence necessary to leave no doubt of the truth on his mind; and he will then see why *Instinct* never errs; while Reason, of which we are so proud, is ever in danger of going astray."—*Ibid.*, p. 197.

The evidence here spoken of, as far as the present writer can learn, has never been produced, and probably never will be, as Sir Graves Haughton, he believes, died in France a year or two ago.

In a little work of much merit occurs the following simple and lucid statement in relation to the so-called faculties of the mind:—

"When we perceive or think of two objects, we do not merely think of them separately; but most often we compare them together, and determine that they are like or unlike; equal or unequal, &c. Judgment is this act of the mind in comparing together two or more objects or notions, and in forming some kind of proposition expressive of the relation which has been perceived. The judgment is often spoken of as if it were a distinct power or faculty of the soul, differing from the imagination, the memory, &c., as the heart differs from the lungs, or the brain from the stomach. All that ought to be understood by these modes of expression is, that the mind sometimes compares objects or notions;—sometimes joins together images; sometimes has the feeling of past time with an idea now present, &c. When it is said that such a one has much imagination, and but little judgment, or of another, that he has an acute judgment but no imagination;—it is intended to say, that one mind is most apt to conceive and to compare *differences* among objects or notions; while another is occupied by *resemblances* and

analogies, and attracted by what is beautiful and sublime.”  
—*Elements of Thought by Isaac Taylor*, 2nd ed. p. 133.

A work was published in the United States, many years ago, under the title of a “Treatise on Language,” which contains some sound views on the mind and its faculties rather curiously expressed. It is entirely occupied, as the preface confesses, with the elucidation of one precept, namely, “to interpret language by nature.”

A specimen or two will show the peculiar tone of thought and phraseology in relation to mental science.

“In what consists the consciousness of a man? in what consists his identity? have been debated, and they are still debated, with the most surprising ignorance of the delusion which gives to the questions their perplexity. Consciousness is supposed to possess as much natural oneness as it possesses verbal oneness; while, in truth, the consciousness of a man is the many phenomena to which the word refers,—precisely as the wealth of a man is the various items of his property to which the word wealth refers.”—*A Treatise on Language, by A. B. Johnson*, p. 63.

“All that has been said in relation to the oneness and identity of external existences (as compared with the oneness and identity of their names), applies even more violently to internal feelings than to sights, sounds, tastes, feels, and smells. In treatises, for instance, which have been written on our passions, appetites, emotions, &c., the internal feelings, &c., which give significancy to the word love, are enumerated not as the meaning of the word love, but as the acts and propensities of a mysterious unit, love, who holds his seat in the heart. *Wisdom, reason, judgment, conscience, instinct, and numerous kindred units, are crowded into the head, where, on invisible tripods, they sit and hold divided dominion over the conduct, thoughts, and feelings of the man in whom they are situated.*”—*Ibid.*, p. 140.

## NOTE B.—LETTER IV.

SIR WM. DRUMMOND, in his "Academical Questions," gives us an amusing account of various metaphors applied to the mind.

"Aristotle, and after his example, some modern philosophers, have pretended, that the soul is entirely passive during our first infancy. They compare it to a *tabula rasa*, upon which (in the language of the Peripatetics) the forms of things are impressed. Not more conjectural, and surely more sublime, was the Platonic doctrine, which taught the pre-existence of the immaterial soul, and according to which it was supposed that the spiritual and incarnate effluence of universal mind gradually awakes to reminiscence and intelligence, after its first slumber has passed in its corporeal prison.

"In what manner, it may be asked, and in what season of life, does human intellect proceed from its passive to its active state? How does the *tabula rasa* receive the forms of things; and when it has received them, how does it become enabled to combine, to alter, and to decompose them?

"We have, no doubt, to admire the variety of those analogies, and the happy choice of those figures, tropes, and metaphors by which different writers have expressed the state of the mind. Sometimes the human intellect is likened to a piece of wax; sometimes to a dark chamber; and sometimes to a sheet of white paper. Here it is a physical point in the midst of a material system, or the intelligent centre of a sphere of attraction and repulsion. There it is placed in a conglomerate gland, which secretes

the animal spirits from the blood. Now we hear of a *sensorium*, the proper seat of the soul; now we are informed that the mind is a stationary monad, which neither acts nor is acted upon; and now we are shown a curious and complicated machine, where ideas and nervous vibrations are proved to be exponents of each other; where the nature of sensations is illustrated by the strings of a harpsichord; and where mental *phenomena* are explained by hints taken from the *pendulum* of a clock. A grave logician of the North talks of ideas being *lodged* in the understanding; and a celebrated French metaphysician makes us mount to a garret in a castle, to have a peep at the country through a hole in the shutter.

“Now, although it be very difficult to speak of the mind, without employing figurative language, and without borrowing something from analogy; yet it is altogether unphilosophical to build an argument on a trope, or a system on a *simile*. There is perhaps no harm in comparing the infant mind to a sheet of white paper, if this be done for the sole purpose of facilitating the comprehension of a metaphysical and abstruse question. In the same manner we may illustrate the nature of the soul by the help of other figurative expressions, provided we do not confound the thing of which we are speaking, with the thing with which it is compared. There, therefore, was impropriety, because there were false conclusions, when Aristotle accounted for the *phenomena* of memory, by supposing the forms of things to be really impressed upon the brain—when Locke argued that the soul receives early sensations by a passive power—and when other philosophers reasoned analogically from matter to mind, until they left their readers to forget, that no analogies can be drawn from the one to the other, except in cases where we speak of laws universal with respect to all beings.”—*Academical Questions*, by Sir Wm. Drummond, p. 26.

In another part of the same work the author says:—

“Nothing has contributed more to render the ideal system obscure, than the inaccuracies into which we are often betrayed in our habits of thinking from our habits of speaking. As language was not invented by philosophers, nor formed for their use, it cannot be expected, that in common life we should speak with that precision which philosophy demands. In science it is necessary that all the terms be accurate; but in conversing or writing upon ordinary topics, this exactness is impracticable, and if it were practicable, would not be desirable. Figurative language, when not carried to excess, is highly agreeable to taste and imagination. It gives splendour to poetry, lustre to eloquence, expression to passion, dignity to sentiment, and poignancy to wit. It is the elegant mantle which Delicacy throws over all that is gross, or vulgar, or deformed. It is the splendid robe of Fancy, and the graceful dress of the Muses. Nevertheless, it is this same license in speech, this free and various colouring of thought, which chiefly helps to perplex us in the study of logic, or the science of metaphysics; and, indeed, in all our inquiries concerning our mental constitution.”—*Academical Questions*, p. 408.

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#### NOTE C.—LETTER VI.

To the other various illustrations of the proper method of viewing the faculties, I will add one from Addison. It might have been included with the rest under Note A, but will come very appropriately as an appendage to the Letter on the classification of mental phenomena.

“The soul consists of many faculties, as the under-

standing, and the will, with all the senses both outward and inward; or, to speak more philosophically, the soul can exert herself in many different ways of action. She can understand, will, imagine, see, and hear; love and discourse, and apply herself to many other the like exercises of different kind and natures; but what is more to be considered, the soul is capable of receiving a most exquisite pleasure and satisfaction from the exercise of any of these its powers, when they are gratified with their proper objects; she can be entirely happy by the satisfaction of the memory, the sight, the hearing, or any other mode of perception. Every faculty is as a distinct taste in the mind, and hath objects accommodated to its proper relish. . . . .

“The happiness may be of a more exalted nature in proportion as the faculty is so; but, as the whole soul acts in the exertion of any of its particular powers, the whole soul is happy in the pleasure which arises from any of its particular acts. For, notwithstanding, as has been before hinted, and as it has been taken notice of by one of the greatest modern philosophers [Locke], we divide the soul into several powers and faculties, there is no such division in the soul itself, since it is the whole soul that remembers, understands, wills, or imagines. Our manner of considering the memory, understanding, will, imagination, and the like faculties, is for the better enabling us to express ourselves in such abstracted subjects of speculation, not that there is any such division in the soul itself.” — *The Spectator*, No. 600.

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#### NOTE D.—LETTER XVII.

IT is rather remarkable that so clear a writer as Berkeley must be allowed to be, should have been so frequently

misunderstood and misrepresented. This observation applies, as will be seen at a glance by any moderately well-informed metaphysician, to the opening of Dr. Darwin's section "Of the Production of Ideas," in his "Zoonomia," vol. i.

"Philosophers have been much perplexed to understand, in what manner we become acquainted with the external world; insomuch that Dr. Berkeley even doubted its existence, from having observed (as he thought) that none of our ideas resemble their correspondent objects."

Here the author of "Zoonomia" is altogether wrong. Berkeley did not doubt the existence of an external material world, but contended that its existence as commonly apprehended is impossible; neither did his doubt, or rather denial of its existence, arise "from having observed that none of our ideas resemble their correspondent objects;" inasmuch as he maintained that there are no correspondent objects—that there are ideas and nothing besides. The only ideas in his theory which could be spoken of as bearing or not bearing a resemblance to anything else, are what he calls copies of the other ideas; that is, in fact, ideas of ideas, which of course must, if correct, resemble their archetypes.

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#### NOTE E.—LETTER XXII.

HORNE TOOKE, who gave his great work the title of "Winged Words," *επεα πτεροεντα*, thus contrasts words with thought in point of velocity:—

"The first aim of Language was to *communicate* our thoughts: the second, to do it with *dispatch*. (I mean

entirely to disregard whatever additions or alterations have been made for the sake of beauty, or ornament, ease, gracefulness, or pleasure.) The difficulties and disputes concerning Language have arisen almost entirely from neglecting the consideration of the latter purpose of speech; which, though subordinate to the former, is almost as necessary in the commerce of mankind, and has a much greater share in accounting for the different sorts of words. Words have been called *winged*; and they well deserve that name, when their abbreviations are compared with the progress which speech could make without these inventions: but compared with the rapidity of thought, they have not the smallest claim to that title. Philosophers have calculated the difference of velocity between sound and light: but who will attempt to calculate the difference between speech and thought! What wonder then that the invention of all ages should have been on the stretch to add such wings to their conversation as might enable it, if possible, to keep pace in some measure with their minds! Hence chiefly the variety of words." — *The Diversions of Purley*, vol. i. p. 26.

He makes another remark on the subject of abbreviations, which, although not immediately related to the rapidity of thought that the preceding passage was cited to illustrate, forms so appropriate a sequel to the passage, and is so valuable in itself, that the reader will, I doubt not, thank me for presenting it to him:—

"It seems to me," says F., the other interlocutor in the dialogue, "that you rather exaggerate the importance of these abbreviations. Can it be of such mighty consequence to gain a little time in communication?"—"Even that," replies H., "is important. But it rests not there. A short, close, and compact method of speech answers



the purpose of a map on a reduced scale : it assists greatly the comprehension of our understanding : and, in general reasoning, frequently enables us at one glance to take in very numerous and distant important relations and conclusions ; which would otherwise totally escape us.”—*Ibid.*, vol. ii. 8vo ed. p. 508.

#### NOTE F.—LETTER XXIII.

THE subjoined passage is remarkably clear, notwithstanding a little confusion between “ ideas ” and “ terms,” and a neglect or an oversight of the important distinction between general and abstract words : —

“ The very nature of abstraction is unreal and imaginary ; it depends upon the negation of every determinate property or idea. No number of cyphers can, by any arithmetical process, be made to produce an unit ; neither can a process of the mind consisting of a negation, bring forth anything positive. Red, and blue, and yellow, and the other colours, each individual ideas, are all distinguished by the general name Colour. By the term we understand one great class of perceptions, different from all others, but bearing a certain relation among themselves, and having a point of similitude in which they all agree. The term is general because it is applicable to each and every one of the individuals of the class. By a false appearance of unity, general ideas have misled many to imagine them to be real substances ; and that the individuals stood in relation to them as properties do to the internal cause by which they subsist. But this unity is wholly ideal. It is even improper to say that a general ideal is one composed of all the individuals of the class, for it is no compleat idea at all, it is only a commodious

term that we apply to any of the several ideas to which it stands. The term Colour applies to blue, to red, and to yellow; but is not an idea composed of those and all other colours. The idea is indefinite, and may less be called an idea than a symbolical term.

“From the ideas we have of a horse, an owl, a whale, and of other beasts, we form the abstract notion of Animal. Under this term we do not conceive, much less imagine to exist, a thing that is neither man, horse, nor fish. The abstraction implies no nature or property essentially new or different from the individual impressions which form its basis, it is used to mean each indifferently, and is merely to be considered as a convenience toward the apprehension of our own thoughts, and the communication of them to others. What an egregious mistake would it be, instead of understanding this abstracted notion to be a help to apprehension, we should run away with the fancy that it was the type and proper semblance of a being that was neither fish, beast nor fowl, yet consisted of all of them; a thing existing neither in time nor place, yet time and place should be necessary to its existence; made up of body and soul, yet possessing neither! I do not know that any one has been guilty of this very absurdity; but the instances are innumerable where this folly has been committed on the same principle, where the procedure was equally visionary, and the inference full as ridiculous.

“The regions of Metaphysics have been crowded by such imaginary creatures. It is not surprising that the plain men of the world should be scared by these chimeras from setting foot upon this ground.”—*An Essay on the Nature and Existence of a Material World*, p. 29. 1781.

Dr. Parr says of this work, that it “abounds with pleasantry as well as abstruse reasoning. The style is perspicuous and elegant, and the model formed upon that

of Mr. Hume." After condemning its unqualified scepticism, the Doctor adds, "During the controversy upon materialism, between Priestley, Price, and others, Priestley met with this book; he was struck with the talents of the writer, he eagerly enquired after him for several years, and at last he was informed that his name was Russel, and that he had left England for the West Indies."

THE END.

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A. and G. A. SPOTTISWOODE,  
New-street-Square.

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PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND.



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1858.



## P R E F A C E.

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THE present Work being only the continuation of a preceding one, the formality of a preface is scarcely required. The various questions discussed in it are not inferior in importance to those which occupied the pages of its predecessor, while some of them may be generally thought superior in interest. The Author ventures to add that he has materials for a third series, but as much time will be required to work them into satisfactory shape and coherence, he can hardly promise himself anything more from the effort to complete them than the solitary pleasure of the labour itself.

*Norbury, near Sheffield,*  
*April 5th, 1858.*



# CONTENTS.

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	Page
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span style="width: 15%;"><u>LETTER</u></span> <span style="width: 85%;"> <u>I. Summary Recapitulation of the principal Discussions in the First Series of "Letters on the Philosophy of the Human Mind" - - - - -</u> </span> </div>	1
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span style="width: 15%;"></span> <span style="width: 85%;"> <u>II. Summary Recapitulation of the principal Discussions in the First Series of "Letters on the Philosophy of the Human Mind"—continued - - -</u> </span> </div>	19
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span style="width: 15%;"></span> <span style="width: 85%;"> <u>III. The Theory of Perception propounded by Dr. Reid - - - - -</u> </span> </div>	34
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span style="width: 15%;"></span> <span style="width: 85%;"> <u>IV. The Doctrines of Sir William Hamilton regarding Perception - - - - -</u> </span> </div>	46
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span style="width: 15%;"></span> <span style="width: 85%;"> <u>V. General and Abstract Ideas and Terms, as treated by Berkeley, Hume, and other Writers of a more recent Date - - -</u> </span> </div>	65
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span style="width: 15%;"></span> <span style="width: 85%;"> <u>VI. General Propositions: their Formation and Character - - - - -</u> </span> </div>	78
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span style="width: 15%;"></span> <span style="width: 85%;"> <u>VII. General Propositions (in continuation). Comparison of the Innate Principles of Leibnitz and the <i>à priori</i> Cognitions of Kant - - - - -</u> </span> </div>	86
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span style="width: 15%;"></span> <span style="width: 85%;"> <u>VIII. General Propositions (in continuation). Propositions expressive of Necessary Facts. The <i>à priori</i> Cognitions of Kant - - - - -</u> </span> </div>	100

	<u>Page</u>
<u>LETTER IX. General Propositions (in continuation).</u>	
Contingent Propositions and Laws of Nature. The <i>à priori</i> Cognitions of Kant further considered - - -	115
<u>X. General Propositions (in continuation).</u>	
Kant's Doctrine of <i>à priori</i> Cognitions as set forth by one of his Expositors -	122
<u>XI. The Prominent Characteristics of German Philosophy and their Causes -</u>	130
<u>XII. The Prominent Characteristics of German Philosophy and their Causes (in continuation) - - -</u>	143
<u>XIII. The Prominent Characteristics of German Philosophy and their Causes (in continuation) - - -</u>	155
<u>XIV. The Causation of Voluntary Actions -</u>	163
<u>XV. The Causation of Voluntary Actions (in continuation) - - -</u>	175
<u>XVI. Physiology in relation to the Philosophy of the Human Mind - - -</u>	190
<u>XVII. Phrenology in relation to the Philosophy of the Human Mind - - -</u>	205
<u>XVIII. The Phrenological Organs considered as Indications of Mental Characteristics -</u>	216
<u>XIX. Phrenological Explanations of Historical and Fictitious Characters - - -</u>	243
<u>XX. Anthropology. Proposed Classification of Inquiries relating to Man - - -</u>	258
<u>XXI. The Present Condition, Estimation, and Prospects of the Philosophy of the Human Mind - - -</u>	270

# LETTERS

ON THE

## PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND.

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### LETTER I.

SUMMARY RECAPITULATION OF THE PRINCIPAL DISCUSSIONS IN THE FIRST SERIES OF "LETTERS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND."

YOU have set me a task not very easy to perform. You ask from me a summary of the doctrines in my first series of letters indicating their order or dependence more plainly than it is indicated in the series itself; and you further request that I would take occasion, as I proceed, to point out their relation to those held by some preceding and contemporary philosophers who have touched on the same subjects.

Your request is, I grant, reasonable enough, and in endeavouring to comply with it, I shall have opportunities of justifying in some degree the professed design with which I set out, and the

accomplishment of which, if I understand you aright, has been called in question.

I said in the opening letter of the series, that I did not contemplate the production of a systematic treatise on mental philosophy, but only an exposition of those parts of it respecting which I seemed to myself (erroneously perhaps) to have something new to say, or something not sufficiently recognised to enforce, or which I might hope to place in a clearer light than had hitherto fallen upon them — no extravagant pretension surely to originality.

I scarcely need to repeat that some pretension of this sort is necessarily implied (although it is in general very properly and prudently not obtruded on the reader) in all treatises which are not avowed compilations or abridgments; and I felt obliged to state it expressly in my own case in order to account for my treating only certain portions of the subject. I would much rather, you may be sure, have left it to be understood, being fully alive to the instinctive renitency of human nature against the slightest direct claim to “the new,” whether in physical research or in metaphysical speculation.

Now whether I have succeeded or not in the proposed design, will be to a considerable extent determined by such a brief summary of the doctrines put forth in the letters and such a passing glance at their bearings on prior or contemporary speculation, as you desire: in the course of which

I hope it will appear that the principal views brought forward, although necessarily interspersed for the mere purposes of connection and transition with familiar knowledge, come under one or other of the predicaments (and it really matters not which) mentioned in the preceding extract: they will be found, at all events, to differ very considerably from those of modern writers in general repute.

I may add that although I have disclaimed the attempt to lay down a system of philosophy, the views which I present to you in these letters are not desultory speculations, but systematized in my own mind; and, how detached so ever they may at first sight appear, form interdependent parts of a connected and consistent whole.

The first two or three letters are mainly occupied in showing the evils of treating the mind as divided into faculties, and of erecting them into so many distinct agents, instead of simply considering the operations and affections, or mental states, of which we are conscious, grouping them into classes, and tracing their laws as we do in the case of physical phenomena.

These evils had been pointed out incidentally and in general terms by sundry philosophers, as I have shown in numerous quotations from Hobbes, Locke, and others; but no one, as far as my knowledge extends, had previously taken the trouble of adducing from eminent writers particular examples

of the asserted consequences, or of directing attention in detail to the specific manner in which the practice referred to, had vitiated and still continues to vitiate the philosophy of mind. As part of the same exposition I have also amply illustrated by examples the great and mischievous prevalence of fictitious or imaginary facts, arising chiefly from this source, in the speculations of many celebrated philosophers.

There are critics, doubtless, who will pronounce the adoption of one method rather than the other to be of little moment, while I on my part consider it of vital consequence. Without contesting their opinion on the present occasion, I will content myself with referring to the philosophers from whose writings I have quoted; one of whom\* stigmatises what I have for shortness called the method of faculties, as no small occasion of wrangling, obscurity, and uncertainty; another†, as the copious source of error, delusion, and rank nonsense; and a third‡, as the origin of innumerable controversies.

With these and other philosophers I not only agree, but I have, as already intimated, furnished ample elucidations of the mischiefs of a method which some of them incidentally proscribed without illustrating it, and, I may add, without avoiding it in their own writings; and which notwithstanding

\* Locke.

† The author of a Fragment on Mackintosh.

‡ Dr. Thos. Brown.

their condemnation of it, still flourishes with unabated vigour. Their protest seems in fact to have been wholly disregarded. In the particular circumstance of ascribing importance to the point in question, I most cheerfully acknowledge myself to have been forestalled by these my predecessors.

To show at once the tenacity with which the practice is still adhered to and the vagueness of thought which it tends to engender, I may adduce the language of one of our most recent and most eminent metaphysicians, Sir William Hamilton. For example, in speaking of consciousness, one of the last things surely that ought to be personified, he uses the following expressions:

"Consciousness assures us that in perception we are immediately cognisant of an external and extended non-ego."\* "Consciousness is the instrument and criterion of the acquisition of truth." "It reveals truths." Again he speaks of "the deliverances of consciousness;" and further, in the same strain although not precisely on the same theme, of "beliefs certifying us of their own veracity."

There may be little objection, I have allowed, to expressions of this kind in ordinary or rhetorical writing (except in point of taste), but in treating of the philosophy of mind, as in physical science, the plainest and most direct forms of speech should,

\* For these and similar expressions, see Reid's Works, Hamilton's Edition, note A.

I have endeavoured to show, be systematically adopted, or futility, confusion, and vacillation of view will most probably result.

Philosophical language, especially when employed to explain the rudiments of psychology, ought to be such as will stand the test of literal construction; or, should that seem too much to require, it ought at least to yield on analysis something better than mere nullities or identical propositions.

Let us make the trial in the instance under review, if it be only for the sake of the curious issue to which it will conduct us.

In the first extract above given from Sir Wm. Hamilton's writings, all that is really meant might, it is clear, be expressed in the simple words "we perceive external and extended objects."

Instead of this, we human beings are first separated from consciousness, and then the latter assures "us" (who while thus separated are of course unconscious entities and therefore incapable of being assured), that in perception, or, in other words, when we perceive an external object, we are immediately cognizant of the object, *i. e.* we do perceive it. Inasmuch as the passage represents "consciousness" as assuring "us," it clearly makes "us" and "consciousness" into two distinct existences, and inasmuch as the assurance given is merely to the effect that we are cognizant of what we perceive, it seems to be a somewhat needless feat to detach consciousness from ourselves in order



that it may attest so mere a truism. The phraseology is not much more philosophical, although perhaps more amusing, when the author speaks of "beliefs certifying us of their own veracity." Here assurance is made doubly sure; for how can we decline taking their word for what they aver? how avoid believing our beliefs on their own testimony, delivered to ourselves, that they are true?

I need not subject to the same analysis the equally futile assertion that "consciousness is the instrument and criterion of the acquisition of truth," than which nothing can well be looser or apparently more unmeaning. There could scarcely be a stronger proof of the danger of personifying mental states or affections than the fact of so acute a metaphysician being led by it into downright platitudes. The personification might have been excused had it brought out any proposition worth enunciating.

It will be said, I know, that this is really being too particular—being hypercritical—requiring a severity and precision of language utterly unattainable, of little utility could it be attained, and which the critic himself might be easily shown not always to observe.

Of this objection, from the substance of which I wholly dissent as founded on an inadequate estimate of the importance in psychological researches of exactness in expression, I have already said something in a former letter and I shall pro-

bably have something more to say in the sequel. At present I adduce the preceding examples of current philosophical language, without pretending to an entire exemption from similar delinquency myself, merely to show that such phraseology continues to prevail amongst the best writers down to our own times; and that if it is not the phraseology likely to further the progress of close and correct thinking in the science of mind, the exposure of its weakness and perplexing tendency has not become either an obsolete or a fruitless task.

In proof of the unsatisfactory state of philosophy, on the points here in question, to a robust and sagacious intellect, I may cite the sentiments of the late Sydney Smith—himself a lecturer on mental science. Writing to Jeffrey he says, “I don’t know whether you agree with me about the present language and divisions of intellectual philosophy. They appear to me in a most barbarous state, and to be found no where in a state of higher confusion and puzzle than in the ‘Intellectual Powers of Dr. Reid.’ ” \*

After having thus exposed the evil consequences flowing in philosophical investigations from the division of the mind into faculties, and from the personifications and laxity of language thence arising, I proceed in my next letter to point out

\* *Memoirs of Sydney Smith*, vol. ii. p. 23.

the mode which I proposed to adopt of classifying mental operations and affections ; or in other words the phenomena of consciousness. This I follow up in subsequent letters by an explanation where needful, of the grounds on which the several parts of the classification are founded.

The arrangement in question may not be worth much : on that point I leave you and others to pronounce ; but both the table itself and more especially some of the explanations which follow are, at all events, considerably different from any other to be met with — the only thing I am at present concerned to show and in which I should be very glad to find that I am mistaken, since the discovery would be a positive addition to my knowledge, and bring with it all the pleasures of coincidence and corroboration in unborrowed opinions.

I may meanwhile direct your attention in this part of the work to my views as to various points ; 1. as to bodily sensations, in regard to which my doctrines are essentially different from those of Reid, Stewart, and Hamilton ; 2. as to the desirable limitation to be observed in employing the words ‘belief’ and ‘judgment,’ in which I am also at variance with the Scottish school ; 3. as to the operations generalised under the word discernment ; 4. as to the composite character of the processes of contingent and demonstrative reasoning ; 5. as to the influence of willing over our intellectual movements, in regard to which there has hitherto been

no generally accepted discrimination; and 6. as to the mixed operations thence arising.

The exposition of the grounds on which my classification is formed and of some important points connected with it, is followed by an analysis of Mr. Stewart's carefully elaborated definition of Reason, in order to exhibit the vagueness, perplexity, and want of precise thinking which, even in so accomplished a philosopher, attend the method of dealing with faculties instead of operations: and in the same letter with the same view is given an examination of Kant's celebrated distinction between the Reason and the Understanding, with an attempt to show what it really amounts to. Both these brief critical disquisitions, right or wrong, differ from any, as far as I know, before presented to the public.

In a subsequent parenthetical epistle I have entered into some explanations of the meaning of words, and the ambiguous import of certain terms in frequent use, preparatory to the Letters which immediately follow and which are dedicated to the important subject of perception.

In these I contend for the direct perception of external objects against Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume and others.

It is true that the bare doctrine there propounded, is anything rather than a novelty; but it will be found, I think, by the careful inquirer that it is held by few metaphysicians in its complete purity and strictness, or with rigid consistency;

and, at any rate, the frequent virtual denial of it, even in our own day, still requires it to be elucidated and enforced.

You will particularly observe, on a close inspection, that I maintain the direct perception of external objects in a much more rigorous sense than many or most of the philosophers of the Scottish school. They, amongst other things, contend for an irresistible belief in the existence of an external world; I, on the contrary, for a direct knowledge of it; and I give my reasons for thinking that theirs is an objectionable mode of stating the real fact, and confounds processes which ought to be kept perfectly distinct.

Thus Sir William Hamilton says, "We do not in propriety *know* that what we are compelled to perceive as not-self, is not a perception of self, and we can only on reflection *believe* such to be the case, in reliance on the original necessity of so believing imposed on us by our nature;"\*—an array of words with as little meaning in them, I must say, notwithstanding my great respect for the writer, as could well be put.

Some of these metaphysicians, be it observed, speak both of our knowing external objects and of our believing in their existence. The distinguished author who in the last quotation has told us we believe because we believe, affirms not very con-

\* Reid's Works, p. 750.

sistently in another passage, "we believe it [the external world] to exist only because we are immediately cognizant of it as existing:"—*i. e.*, we believe it to exist because we know it to exist. Surely knowledge supersedes belief. He had better have kept to the statement that we believe because nature has thrust the belief upon us.

Reid's doctrine is so far different from mine (which is the simple doctrine of all persons who are not metaphysicians) that it may be doubted, as Sir W. Hamilton after an elaborate examination admits, whether it is to be held as maintaining direct perception at all. My reasons for joining in the doubt and extending it to the views of Sir W. Hamilton himself, I will reserve for two separate letters, since to state them here at length would interfere too much with the train of explanations in which I am engaged. I will at present content myself with a single remark by way of intimating the nature of the difference between the learned editor of Reid and myself. While he professedly holds the doctrine that we directly perceive external objects, he virtually abandons it, as it appears to me, when he speaks of our perceiving the thing nearest to our organisation and of our not immediately perceiving distant objects.

"In the third place," he says, "to this head we may refer Reid's inaccuracy in regard to the precise object of perception. This object is not as he seems frequently to assert any distant reality; for

we are percipient of nothing but what is in proximate contact, in immediate relation, with our organs of sense. Distant realities we reach not by perception but by a subsequent process of inference founded thereon.”\*

\* The Works of Dr. Reid, by Sir W. Hamilton, p. 814.

There is a very explicit passage of similar tendency in Dr. Porterfield which is worth quoting: “How body acts upon mind, or mind upon body, I know not, but this I am very certain of, that nothing can act or be acted upon, where it is not; and therefore our mind can never perceive anything but its own proper modifications, and the various states of the sensorium to which it is present: so that it is not the external sun and moon which are in the heavens, which our mind perceives, but only their image or representation impressed upon the sensorium. How the soul of a seeing man sees these images, or how it receives these ideas from such agitations in the sensorium, I know not; but I am sure it can never perceive the external bodies themselves, to which it is not present.”—*Treatise on the Eye*, vol. ii. p. 356, quoted by both Reid and Stewart.

The fictitious facts here asserted scarcely need pointing out. We do not perceive “images impressed upon the sensorium,” nor “the various states of the sensorium,” nor do we receive (consciously) ideas from “agitations in the sensorium;” while on the other hand, contrary to what Dr. Porterfield asserts, we really perceive the external bodies themselves. It is vain to try to evade this simple fact by pleading the impossibility of the mind perceiving objects to which it is not present. What after all does he mean by the mind being present to objects? It can mean no more than perceiving them: so that to affirm that the mind cannot perceive objects to which it is not present, amounts to the truism that it cannot perceive what it cannot perceive. In a subsequent letter devoted to an examination of Sir W. Hamilton’s views on this subject, I shall have occasion to enter into the consideration of a doctrine similar to the strange assertion of Dr. Porterfield’s above quoted, that “it is not the external sun and moon which are in the heavens, which our mind perceives.”

In contrariety to these views what I maintain is, that we perceive the object itself notwithstanding its being distant, and that we do not in that case perceive what is nearest to the organ, as is most conspicuous in the instance of sight: further that no knowledge of the intermediate material or organic process, such as a picture being formed on the retina, or of rays of light proceeding from the object and impinging on the organ (of all which we may be profoundly ignorant) can affect the conscious act of perceiving, of which they form no part. It is to be observed, too, that in consistency with his doctrine on this point, my learned and able contemporary is a holder, in common with almost all his countrymen, of Berkeley's Theory of Vision, which is incompatible, in my judgment, with a sound doctrine of perception. So prevalent had that theory become, so stereotyped in the minds of philosophers, that when I first broached my heresy as to the utter groundlessness of the bishop's celebrated but little understood speculation, I was supported by scarcely a single professed metaphysician of the day. Better things may now be said. The difference on this point, I may venture to add, is a radical one and affects the whole philosophy of the intellect.

In the survey taken in the "Letters," of writers on the theory of Perception, there are several other points which, if not peculiar to myself, either have been almost entirely lost sight of, or still require to



be urged on account of prevailing errors or differences of opinion regarding them.

To take them in order.

I show at some length Locke's error and inconsistency in teaching that we know nothing but our own sensations or ideas, and have no knowledge of external objects, which knowledge he is yet continually assuming that we possess. It may possibly occur to many readers, that in the present day such an exposure is needless, inasmuch as the doctrine is no longer held: and I might have thought so myself, had I not found it virtually and even explicitly maintained in the writings not only of the majority of those German metaphysicians with whom I am at all acquainted but of eminent contemporary philosophers in our own country as well as in abundance of English elementary works and compilations. One or two examples will show how strongly it has rooted itself in our Literature.

"It may therefore," says an able writer, "safely be laid down as a truth both obvious in itself, and admitted by all whom it is at present necessary to take into consideration, that of the outer world we know and can know absolutely nothing except the sensations which we experience from it."\*

This strictly interpreted is making our sensations a part of the external world (which the writer could not of course intend) somewhat like Milton in-

\* A System of Logic, by J. S. Mill, vol. i. p. 80.

advertently making Eve one of her own daughters\*, but it clearly maintains that we do not know external objects and speaks of our not knowing them both as an obvious and an admitted truth.

"The idea of a horse," says another modern logician, "is the horse in the mind, and we know no other horse. We admit that there is an external object, a horse which may give a horse in the mind to twenty different persons: but no one of these twenty knows the object, each one only knows his idea. There is an object, because each of the twenty persons receives an idea without communicating with the others; so that there is something external to give it them. But when they talk about it, under the name of a horse, they talk about their ideas." †

The rather contemptuous setting aside of all realists by Mr. Mill as too insignificant to be taken into consideration, is a presumptive proof that he could not be familiar, if he were at all acquainted, with the celebrated Article on Perception in the *Edinburgh Review* of October 1830, which was subsequently translated into both French and Italian and republished in Sir W. Hamilton's *Discussions* in 1852. The latter author, however, returns the sinister compliment by no measured censure of the Cosmothetic Idealists (to use the

\* "Say, did not Milton our first mother make  
The fairest of her daughters—by mistake?"

† *Formal Logic* by Augustus de Morgan, p. 29.

baronet's peculiar phraseology) amongst whom both Mr. Mill and Mr. de Morgan are to be ranked. Of Cosmothetic Idealism, Sir William says, "This last, though the most vacillating, inconsequent, and self-contradictory of all systems, is the one which, as less obnoxious in its acknowledged consequences (being a kind of compromise between speculation and common sense) has found favour with the immense majority of philosophers." \*

Before quitting Locke I also point out what I deem the radical error in his method of treating his subject (it being indeed the necessary consequence or accompaniment of the preceding mistake), namely, not keeping distinct in thought and language the *objects* of perception (in his nomenclature the sensations) and the *ideas* or representations we subsequently have of them; an error on his part, prolific of all sorts of confusion, although never before I believe brought into distinct view (I should rejoice to find it had been); nay, one on which I do not recollect at the present moment to have seen the slightest direct animadversion in any antecedent commentator on Locke's essay.

Had this thoughtful philosopher been able to free himself from the embroilment here pointed out, the simple truths which were at the bottom of his speculations but which in consequence of this

\* Reid's Works, p. 749.

confusion he only imperfectly developed, would have come out in their natural clearness and cogency ; namely, 1. That the *objects* of human knowledge are of two kinds, external existences and events perceived through the organs of sense, and internal states and operations, or in other words mental existences and events ; which two classes comprise everything we actually know : 2. That our *ideas* are representative of the objects belonging to one or other of these two classes ; and other ideas than these we have none, although we have the power of putting them together in new combinations of endless diversity.

But my letter is growing too long, and I must here break off.

## LETTER II.

SUMMARY RECAPITULATION OF THE PRINCIPAL DISCUSSIONS IN THE FIRST SERIES OF "LETTERS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND"—CONTINUED.

I RESUME my summary.

The letters which immediately follow the observations on Locke are devoted to some strictures on Berkeley's theory of the non-existence of matter. I mark in the first place the precise point where he deviates into error and assumes the very thesis he sets himself to prove: and I then proceed to show the fictitious or imaginary facts which he assigns in explanation of real phenomena. Subsequently I not only explain the relation in which his theory stands to common opinion but point out the inconsistency of Berkeley's own statements of that relation and the sources of it—a part of his writings which has greatly contributed to perplex his readers, and has not, as far as I can find, been elucidated by any of his commentators.

I follow this up by an argument—certainly unborrowed—which, if valid, demonstrates what has been frequently affirmed without demonstration, that the existence of external objects is not

susceptible of either proof or disproof—that it is in truth out of the province of proof altogether.

In the letter immediately following, I adduce the declaration of Hume that Berkeley's arguments "admit of no answer and yet produce no conviction;" and I do not hesitate to venture upon the counter-declaration that Berkeley notwithstanding the credit commonly given to him, brings forward no arguments whatever (those in a circle excepted) to substantiate his fundamental position, but at once assumes what it was his professed business to establish by proof. I further show how Hume's declaration that Berkeley's arguments are unanswerable\*, is the more extraordinary inasmuch

\* That Berkeley's arguments are logically unanswerable seems even now a prevalent tradition. "The opinion of the ablest judges," says Dr. Reid, "seems to be that they neither have been nor can be confuted; and that he hath proved by unanswerable arguments what no man in his senses can believe."—*Inquiry into the Human Mind*, chap. i. sect. 5. "The confutation of the scepticism on this subject," says Dr. Thos. Brown, "it is evident, may be attempted in *two ways*,—by showing the arguments urged by the sceptic to be *logically false*; or by opposing to them the belief itself, as of evidence either directly intuitive, or the result, at least, of other intuitions, and early and universal associations and inferences, so irresistible after the first acquisitions of infancy, as to have then all the force of intuition itself. As long as Dr. Reid confines himself to the latter of these pleas, he proceeds on safe ground; but his footing is not so firm when he assails the mere logic of the sceptic,—for the sceptical argument *as a mere play of reasoning admits of no reply*."—*Lectures*, vol. ii. p. 51.

as he himself although generally regarded as a follower of Berkeley misconceived the bishop's theory, and really maintained one in contradiction to it. If this criticism on Hume has been anticipated, I shall certainly be both surprised and gratified to learn the fact.

I afterwards discuss a more subtle representation of the ideal theory as given by Dr. Thomas Brown, although not originating with him; and animadvert on several points connected with the general doctrine which it would be tedious here to recapitulate. Of these comments, I will nevertheless mention one. Having before shown that the existence of external objects is not susceptible of either proof or disproof, I now show that there is a latent absurdity not only in Berkeley's but in every possible form of the ideal theory; an inherent self-contradiction in every denial, however it may be expressed, of the perception or the existence of external material objects; an inevitable assumption, on the part of the deniers, of that which they deny.

Putting these two arguments together — the first demonstrating that the existence of an external world is not in the very nature of the case susceptible of proof, that it is out of the province of proof altogether; and the second showing that it cannot be denied without self-contradiction — we obtain a complete answer to any system of idealism that it is possible to devise.

The discussions in reference to Berkeley's theory

of which I have given this brief account, differ in material respects, and especially in the one last named, from any I have ever met with; and that they are at the least timely and needed, is shown by the misconceptions or different interpretations of the theory to be found not only in writers of the past age whom I have already pointed out, such as Hume and Darwin, but in authors of our own day. One or two remarkable instances will suffice to substantiate this assertion.

"The question respecting the Ideal Theory of Berkeley," says a living writer, "has been mixed up with the recognition of this condition of the externality of objects. That philosopher maintained, as is well known, that the perceptible qualities of bodies have no existence except in a perceiving mind. This system has often been understood as if he imagined the world to be a kind of optical illusion, like the images which we see when we shut our eyes, appearing to be without us, though they are only in our organs; and thus this Ideal System *has been opposed to a belief in an external world. In truth, however, no such opposition exists.*"\*

Compare this representation with Berkeley's own statement: "In common talk," he says, "the objects of our senses are not termed *ideas* but *things*. Call them so still, *provided you do not attribute to*

\* The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences, by Rev. W. Whewell, D.D., vol. i. p. 269.



*them any absolute external existence, and I shall never quarrel with you for a word.\**

"Did men but consider," he says in another place, "*that the sun, moon, and stars, and every other object of the senses, are only so many sensations in their minds, which have no other existence but barely being perceived, doubtless they would never fall down and worship their own ideas.*"†

Even the able author of a *System of Logic* narrows Berkeley's theory by characterising it as

\* Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous.

† Principles of Human Knowledge, sect. 94. This passage furnishes a remarkable instance, in Berkeley himself, of the same blunder which has drawn down so much just discredit on some of his opponents—the fallacy of assuming that those who adopt the ideal hypothesis must, to be logically consistent, act differently from what they otherwise would do. Thus Dr. Reid maintains that the idealists ought not in rigid consistency to avoid running their heads against a post or walking into a ditch; a preposterous misconception on his part which was well exposed by Dr. Priestley in his *Examination of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald*. The stories told of Pyrrho's *acting* such blunders are wholly incredible and are in fact blunders on the part of those who invented them. It is highly curious and instructive to find Berkeley in his zeal to proclaim the blow which his doctrine would give to atheism and superstition, committing himself in the same way by insisting, that if men knew that the sun, moon, and stars, were only their own ideas, they would never fall down and worship them. He might just as well have said that if men knew that the dishes before them at dinner were only their own ideas they would never fall to and eat them. Such passages inspire a doubt whether he had fully mastered his own theory, and at all events confirm the observation in the text that a false system is almost sure to be marked by inconsistencies.

scepticism relating to a supposed substratum,\* whereas the question about a substratum is a minor point, as I have shown in Letter 16, and the existence of such a thing may be denied by an anti-Berkeleyian. Further Berkeley's mental state as described by himself is not scepticism, although generally styled so, but downright dogmatism—dogmatic denial of the existence of an absolute external world, which he pronounces to be impossible. It must be acknowledged, however, that by a sort of natural necessity, Berkeley, like every inventor or expositor of a false system, is often inconsistent with himself.

Having finished my comments on Berkeley, I bring forward several circumstances in perception not always (I take occasion to remark) perspicuously treated, and apply the conclusions at which I arrive to certain speculations of Hobbes, D'Alembert, and Stewart, on the subject of colour, insisting by the way on the truth too often overlooked, that a knowledge of the physical process in perception does not at all affect the nature of the mental act. In these special illustrations and animadversions, be their worth what it may, I am not conscious of having been preceded by any critic or commentator either here or abroad, and should be by no means displeased to find that I had, inasmuch as I have reason to apprehend a pretty general dissent from the views there propounded—an apprehension

\* Vol. ii. p. 471.

which would give a relish to the discovery of coincidence in any quarter. With one eminent metaphysician of the present day, Sir Wm. Hamilton, I find myself greatly at variance on the points in question.

The two next letters are devoted to an examination of Kant's theory of perception, dividing it for the sake of perspicuity into the negative doctrine respecting our non-knowledge of external things, and the positive doctrine that our minds act upon them and even give birth to them. This division and the subsequent examination are, as far as I know, different in many respects from any before published, although in the innumerable comments which have been given to the world on the philosopher in question, it is likely enough that I have been more or less anticipated. That in the mode of answering him, however, unanimity is still to be attained, and discussion still required, is proved by the criticisms called forth in consequence of my asserting that his proposition "*we cannot know things in themselves*," is perfectly unmeaning. Kant's doctrine on this point is endorsed (to use an old phrase in a modern application \*) by many if not most of the metaphysical writers of the present day.†

\* "A low metaphor," says Dr. Richardson, "from the counting-house."—*Supplement to Dictionary*.

† See Cousin amongst others in his *Cours d'Histoire de la Philosophie Morale*.

In Letter 21 I pass from the consideration of perception to that of the dependent and secondary operation named 'conception' or 'having ideas,' showing after Reid and others, as a step to what follows, that ideas bear no part in the former process, and adding that they are without exception *representative* phenomena. I further show that when the term idea has been applied or has been supposed to be applied to any thing else than representative affections of the mind, there has been a misconception of the phenomena so designated.

As this doctrine, which is much wider in scope than may at first sight appear, and the bearings and consequences of which I know no one who fully grasps, is incompatible with the existence of any ideas corresponding to general and abstract terms, I enter next into the consideration of such terms, and endeavour to illustrate the truth that, like proper names, they raise up nothing but ideas of individual objects — that there are no such things as either general ideas (which are of course denied by all consistent nominalists) or abstract ideas (sometimes called simple ideas) for the existence of which some eminent nominalists see no inconsistency in contending. The same assertion is equally applicable to general and abstract notions and conceptions which are only the same alleged mental phenomena under different names.

The latter opinion, namely that there are such things as abstract or simple ideas — ideas non-

representative in character—I next proceed to examine, selecting for this purpose the exposition of it given by its decided supporter Mr. Dugald Stewart, in order to show its unsoundness and to vindicate my own views. And, lastly, to exhibit the importance of duly appreciating the bearings of this part of philosophy, I enter upon the consideration of several common names and abstract terms which have been the subjects of much perplexity and dispute, and particularly the words cause, causation, power, time, and space, applying my conclusions to some celebrated doctrines of Hume and Kant relating to them or to their signification.

In maintaining the non-existence of such things as general and abstract ideas, I do not commit the folly of claiming originality for a doctrine well known for ages before I was born. On the contrary I quote an ample passage from Berkeley, in which it is most explicitly laid down; and he, although Hume ascribes the origination of it to him\*, had

\* So at least I read the following passage in the Treatise of Human Nature, part 1, section 7: “A very material question has been started concerning *abstract* or *general* ideas, *whether they be general or particular in the mind's conception of them*. A great philosopher [Dr. Berkeley] has disputed the received opinion in this particular, and has asserted, that all general ideas are nothing but particular ones annexed to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recall upon occasion other individuals which are similar to them. As I look upon this to be one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries that has been made of late years in the republic of letters, I shall here endeavour to confirm it by

numerous predecessors in it. I rest the conformity of introducing these discussions with my declared purpose, partly on some degree of novelty or at any rate greater strictness in the mode of explaining and applying the doctrine, in which there has been much of both defect and inconsistency; partly on the ground of pushing it farther to its consequences than most if not all preceding writers; and partly on the fact that, as far at least as abstract or simple ideas are concerned, and even farther, it is still extensively denied, and needs to be illustrated and enforced.

Indeed, since Berkeley's clear and explicit declaration of his opinion on the subject, I scarcely know a writer who has completely adopted and thoroughly, accurately, and consistently, carried out the denial of general and abstract ideas.

The philosophers subsequent to him, who appear to me to have made the nearest approach to this (and even Berkeley himself only approached it) are Hume and Dr. Thomas Brown; and with these may be joined one or two more recent writers of

some arguments which I hope will put it beyond all doubt and controversy." It is marvellous how Hume could write this in face of the long controversy which had been carried on century after century between the Nominalists and Realists. He had only to turn to the writings of Hobbes to see the doctrine which he treats as a discovery of Berkeley's, stated with the utmost clearness and precision. Mr. Stewart has incidentally noticed Hume's historical lapse on the point before us.

repute, in the present century. Still in all these authors, amidst clear enunciations of the truth, are to be found apparent inaccuracies, inconsistencies, or infelicities of exposition. Of such an assertion some proof may be reasonably required; but since to produce it would involve considerable detail, I will consign it to a separate letter.

As an instance that abstract ideas — ideas of a non-representative character — continue to be maintained down to the present time, I may cite Sir William Hamilton, who every where admits the existence of abstract notions, and specifically asserts that there are thoughts which “cannot be represented in the imagination, as the thought suggested by a general term:” \* which is directly contrary to my doctrine that we have none but representative ideas, and that the thoughts called up by general terms are, in all cases, thoughts of particular objects or events, physical or mental, although they may be in trains or groups; that in a word there are no *distinctive* mental phenomena induced or implied by those terms. Indeed the whole of this distinguished author’s writings abound with the recognition and assertion of abstract notions. Amongst the rest he maintains that we

\* Sir Wm. Hamilton’s edition of Reid’s Works, p. 360. The assertion here quoted is not in reference to any restricted meaning of the term imagination, since it is made without limitation and would consequently apply to general terms denoting visible objects as well as to any others.

have abstract ideas of space and time, the non-  
entity of which I have taken some pains to show.

If I wanted further examples, I might find them  
in abundance in writers who, although of high  
standing in mathematical or physical science, can  
scarcely take equal rank as metaphysicians, such as  
Dr. Whewell and Mr. de Morgan, whose dissertations  
about ideas present an ample and tempting field  
for criticism and comment, to any one who has  
leisure to enter upon it.

I am not here contending, you will observe, that  
my views on these latter points are correct — the  
evidence on that point must be sought in the body  
of the original letters themselves — but that while  
they have eminent authorities more or less in their  
favour, they are at variance with those of recent  
writers competent to form their own opinions; and  
consequently that the whole subject still requires  
to be discussed and to be placed in fresh lights.

You will observe too that in claiming some  
degree of novelty or in pointing out instances of  
departure from the track of my predecessors in the  
treatment of various questions, I frequently use the  
qualification "as far as I know," or other equiva-  
lent phrases, because it is quite possible in the  
abundance of extant works that preceding writers,  
without my being aware of it notwithstanding a  
pretty extensive reading on the subject or in some  
cases without my remembering what ought not to  
have escaped recollection, may have been before-  
hand with me in some of my comments and specu-



lations. Should this be the case, I should feel obliged if you or any other critic would do me the favour to name the works and quote the passages in which such anticipations when they are of any importance are to be found ; or, if this is too much, at least to indicate them by particular references.

I shall have unaffected pleasure in becoming acquainted with such coincidences and yielding to the authors who have forestalled me all the honour of priority.

It is not surely for the mental philosopher above all others (although we authors of whatever description are weak creatures in this respect) to indulge the feeling expressed in the trite saying "*Pereant qui ante nos nostra dixêre*," — a saying which is or ought to be less applicable to the searcher after truth — the man of science or the metaphysician, than to the creator of emotion — the wit or the poet. In the prosecution of inquiry there is always, as every one must admit, great reason for satisfaction in finding conclusions which we have reached in the course of our own thinking, clearly laid down and proved by others before us. It may fairly be questioned, indeed, whether, on the whole, the confirmation obtained from the concurrence of independent thinkers in the same views, does not yield a higher pleasure than mere priority in discovery.

An author who is desirous of assisting the progress of knowledge may be thus placed in an agreeable kind of dilemma. If his views should prove

to have been anticipated he will have the solid satisfaction of being confirmed in them by the concurrence of others ; and thus, feeling more sure of his ground, he will be better prepared to essay a further advance ; if, on the other hand, they have not been anticipated, although he will lose in that case the satisfaction described, he will enjoy the elevating thought of having probably done something towards the attainment of truth, even were it only by the promulgation of some new form of error. On either supposition, if the speculations have proceeded from earnest inquiry and from any real insight into the subject, they will bear unmistakable marks of having been " cast in the mould of his own mind," and so far be of genuine value.

You will, nevertheless, see the propriety of such a one holding himself excused from admitting on the bare assertion of any critics or commentators whatever, that he has been forestalled in such of his matured speculations as wear to him some appearance of novelty. If he possesses any accurate and competent knowledge of the history and actual state of the philosophical doctrines discussed — a knowledge undoubtedly very difficult to be acquired by either author or critic — there is no call upon him to surrender his own convictions in this respect to any thing short of actual proof. But on these points I say no more. The question of priority or novelty or originality, is, after all, a petty question beside that of truth, although truth

itself requires that, whenever it is agitated, it shall be justly settled.

I cannot refrain from appending to the explanations now concluded, an extract from a letter addressed to our distinguished countryman Dr. Thomas Young by the celebrated French philosopher Fresnel, in reference to some discoveries in Physical Optics which appear to have been independently achieved by both. If the writer of the following passage had not quite attained the philosophic spirit which I have attempted to describe, he must be allowed to have approached it, and not to have been insensible to the real advantage flowing even from the misfortune of having been forestalled. "When we believe," says Fresnel, "that we have made a discovery, it is not without regret that we find that another has made it before us; and I will frankly confess to you, Sir, that such was the feeling I experienced, when M. Arago showed me that there were only a small number of observations really new in my original memoir. But if any thing could console me for not having the advantage of priority, it is that it has brought me into contact with a philosopher who has enriched physical science with so great a number of important discoveries, a circumstance which has not a little contributed to increase my own confidence in the theory which I have adopted."\*

\* Life of Dr. Thomas Young, by Dr. Peacock.

## LETTER III.

THE THEORY OF PERCEPTION PROPOUNDED BY  
DR. REID.

WHEN I was treating the subject of perception, I did not deem it necessary to enter into an examination of Dr. Reid's views regarding it, partly to avoid wearying the reader, and partly because I thought the difference between his doctrines and mine would be sufficiently obvious, to any one who felt an interest in the matter, from my classification of the phenomena of consciousness and the accompanying elucidations.

On more mature consideration, however, and especially after your intimation that I have been spoken of by several critics as a follower of Dr. Reid, I have seen reason to conclude that a brief commentary on his doctrines regarding this part of philosophy might not be superfluous or misplaced. What is more important, it will give me an opportunity of more fully explaining the peculiar views I entertain of the relation in which sensation and perception stand to each other.

Dr. Reid, it cannot be doubted, virtually denied, in several parts of his writings, the direct percep-

tion of external objects, although not consistently with many express declarations. His theory is that physical impressions on the organs of the senses produce sensations, and that these sensations *suggest* to the mind external objects, in the same way that signs suggest the things signified by them. Thus, to quote his own words, "When I see an object the appearance which *the colour* of it makes may be called *the sensation* which suggests to me some external thing as its cause."

That this doctrine of Reid's should have made any way amongst philosophers is to me marvellous. I cannot recognise in my own experience such a process as the sensation of colour *suggesting* an external thing. I directly and immediately see the coloured external object. You will not fail to observe, in particular, that the word *suggest* as Dr. Reid uses it, implies that the object suggested is not present to the organs of sense. He compares the process to that of signs suggesting the things which they denote; but when a sign (*e.g.* a written word) suggests the thing signified, it is under the two conditions that the thing signified is or may be absent and that it has been previously known in connexion with the sign. Here, then, unless we can perceive absent things, there is undoubtedly a virtual denial of the direct perception of external objects (although not consistently as I have already said with numerous express declarations) and moreover an assertion that the sensation suggests a

thing previously unknown and unconnected with it. Taking suggestion in its ordinary sense—in the sense indeed required by the analogy employed by himself—he might I think with equal propriety have maintained that a proper name could suggest to him the image or likeness of a man whom he had never seen.

If in spite of this unfortunate comparison to signs and things signified, we were to give Dr. Reid, all the benefit which may be derived from his distinction of suggestion into natural and artificial and, carrying concession even farther, construe the word to mean originating something before unknown—bringing a thing *into the mind* instead of bringing it *to mind*\*,—the doctrine would certainly be quit of one objection, but others would remain. The theory would still be that a sensation is always interposed between the percipient and the external object, or, to state it in its least vulnerable form, that we perceive external objects by first having sensations; that sensations are a primary and perceptions a secondary state of mind; that the former invariably precede the latter. The doctrine so modified may be given in his own words: “the impression,” he says, “made upon the organ, nerves, and brain, is followed by a sensation,

\* Mr. Stewart, in explanation of this point, says that Dr. Reid employs the word to comprehend not only the *intimations* which are the result of experience, but those which result from the original frame of the human mind. — *Dissertation*, p. 167.

and this sensation is followed by the perception of the object." \*

The most curious passage, however, asserting such a succession is the following :

"The impression made upon the nerves and brain is performed behind the scenes and the mind sees nothing of it. But every such impression by the laws of the drama is followed by a sensation, which is the *first* scene exhibited to the mind, and this scene is quickly succeeded by *another*, which is *the perception* of the object." † Here there is nothing about signs and suggestion : the sensations and perceptions are spoken of as equally "exhibited to the mind," the former not signifying but only preceding the latter.

Now although we may have, as I shall proceed to explain, certain sensations along with the perception of external objects, the latter is in such cases as instantaneous and direct as the former ; ‡ the one is no more secondary than the other ; there is no succession as here represented ; neither are a sensation and a perception in the case of all the senses necessarily conjoined. To this last point I

\* Inquiry into the Human Mind. — See chapters ii. and vi.

† In another passage both sensation and perception are ascribed to inspiration. "We are inspired with the sensation, and we are inspired with the corresponding perception by means unknown."— *Inquiry into the Human Mind*, chap. vi. sect. 21.

‡ That "sensation proper and perception proper" are simultaneous, is maintained against Reid by his editor. See Hamilton's edition, p. 186.

entreat your particular attention as the affirmative is expressly maintained by Reid, Stewart, and Hamilton, however they may vary on other points connected with it. Had it not been for their erroneous views, as I take them to be, regarding sensation, I should scarcely have troubled you with the present letter.

In the whole of this doctrine, the author has, I think, confounded together matters which ought to be kept separate, and has misconceived what actually takes place. On referring to the classification of the phenomena of consciousness already presented to you in a former letter, you will find that I have there put down bodily sensations as of a distinct genus and even of a distinct order from acts of perceiving ; but it is unquestionable that we frequently have sensations of this kind at the same time that we perceive external objects ; and we have them not only in other parts of the body but in the very organs through which we perceive.

In the case of touch, when I tactually perceive an external object, as, for example, the pen I hold in my hand, I am conscious also of perceiving it by means of a certain part of the body, namely the thumb and fingers. Here is doubtless a bodily sensation combined with the perception of an external object ; but the first does not suggest or necessarily introduce the second. We have assuredly the feeling that we possess thumbs and fingers before the pen is taken up, and so far it is



prior to the act of perceiving ; but perceiving the pen and feeling that we perceive it with a certain part of the body must be simultaneous and inseparable.

With the sense of sight the case is different. When I see an object under ordinary circumstances, I am not conscious of any affection in the *organ* of sight. I am conscious of perceiving the object at some distance but not of any sensation in the eye itself. It is quite true that even in the exercise of sight I may have such a sensation. When I look upon a shining object, it may be so dazzling as to occasion a pain felt to be localized in the organ of sight ; but the object itself you will observe is not perceived to be there, and this clearly shows what it is to have a bodily sensation and what it is to perceive.

Even Dr. Reid admits that visual perception may be disjoined from sensation. After remarking that the perceptions we have might have been (as I contend they are) immediately connected with the impressions on our organs without any intervention of sensations, he adds, "this last seems really to be the case in one instance, to wit, in our perception of the visible figure of bodies."\*

\* How Dr. Reid reconciled this with a passage before quoted from him, designating "the appearance which the colour of the object makes, the sensation which suggests the external object," it is not easy to see, since visible figure cannot be perceived without colour. It is perhaps part of that doctrine of visible

What has been said of sight applies to hearing. When we hear we have not necessarily any bodily sensation localized in the ears. We perceive external sounds without feeling the body to be affected in that part unless they are so loud as to produce uneasiness or unless the organ is in a morbid condition.

A similar observation may be made as to smelling, but is not applicable to touching, and not perhaps to tasting, in both of which there is a feeling that perception is taking place in a certain part of the body.

In strict accordance with these observations we find that pain experienced in the eye is felt through the instrumentality of a different nerve from that which is the medium of seeing external objects. A nerve possessed of a quality totally different from that of the optic nerve, extends over all the exterior surfaces of the eye, and gives to those surfaces their delicate sensibility.\*

Thus my definition of a bodily sensation is "an affection felt to be in some part of the body, whether attended or not by a discernment of any

figure which even his admirer Dugald Stewart confesses himself incapable of entering into [Dissertation, p. 66.] Nor is Reid consistent in what he expressly says about colour, sometimes representing it as a *sensation suggesting* a perception, sometimes as a *perception*, or at least a something *suggested*. See Inquiry, chap. 6. sect. 8.

\* The Hand, by Sir Charles Bell, p. 161.

thing different from or external to the sentient being:" while my definition of *perception* is "discerning something different from or external to the percipient being, whether attended or not by a bodily sensation."

In these particular views of sensation and perception, and of the connexion between them, I differ fundamentally, as already indicated, not only from Dr. Reid but also from Dugald Stewart and Sir Wm. Hamilton; all of whom, although they disagree more or less in details, accord in the main; and they especially unite in asserting (save in the single exceptional case of Dr. Reid's before mentioned) that sensation as a distinct phenomenon always accompanies the perception of external objects.\*

Eminent authorities combining to support the same theory, ought to stimulate a dissentient to rigorous and repeated examination of the grounds of his dissent. Such, in the case before us, I have bestowed. The account I have given of these

\* Sir Wm. Hamilton may not always appear consistent in regard to this invariable concomitance. In one place [Discussions, p. 67], he says, "Perception and sensation, the objective and subjective [a curious use of these terms], *though both always co-existent*, are always in the inverse ratio of each other;" while in other places [Reid's Works, pp. 248, 821], he maintains it is not necessary that sensation should precede perception. But there is no inconsistency. In the latter passages he does not deny *concomitance* but merely *sequence* — the antecedence of sensation to perception.

mental phenomena, is a faithful and well-considered description of what I am myself conscious of.

Sir Wm. Hamilton has entered into an elaborate consideration of Dr. Reid's whole theory of perception, arranging in separate order the passages favouring the doctrine of *immediate* perception (denominated by Sir William, Presentationism or Natural Realism) and those favouring the doctrine of *mediate* perception (in Sir William's language Egoistical Representationism). On a comparison of these dissonant passages, he finally comes to the conclusion that his predecessor did in reality confound the two doctrines here mentioned. Speaking of Reid's erroneous criticism (as he thinks it) of Arnauld's doctrine on the subject, namely, that it was inconsistent with itself, he proceeds:—

“This plainly shows that he [Reid] had not realized to himself a clear conception of the two doctrines of Presentationism and Egoistical Representationism, in themselves and in their contrasts. But it also proves that when the conditions and consequences of the latter scheme, even in its purest form, were explicitly enounced, that he was then sufficiently aware of their incompatibility with the doctrine which he himself maintained—a doctrine, therefore, it may be fairly contended (though not in his hands clearly understood, far less articulately developed) substantially one of Natural Realism.”\*

\* Reid's Works, p. 823.

The same author adds that the theory of suggestion so explicitly maintained in the "Inquiry," is not repeated in the later work, the "Essays on the Intellectual Powers," and that therefore Reid may have become doubtful as to its tendency.

The term suggestion may not perhaps be found, but the theory that there is in perception a sign and a thing signified (which virtually implies it) is plainly re-asserted in the Essays. "Every different perception," he there says, "is conjoined with a sensation proper to it. *The one is the sign, the other the thing signified.* They coalesce in the imagination."\*

I have said that this phraseology is virtually the same as using the word suggestion, but it is in fact more objectionable, inasmuch as although suggestion may be explained to mean (awkwardly enough it is true) the original introduction of something into the mind, a sign cannot with any propriety be spoken of as signifying (and indeed cannot signify) any thing not previously known.

My own conclusion is that Reid while he retained his theory as first propounded, was utterly unconscious of its being in that shape at all inconsistent with holding a direct knowledge of the external world. He had not in fact a clear insight into the subject, and as a consequence held incompatible doctrines.

\* Essay II. chap. xvi.

But a still more extraordinary unconsciousness of inconsistency in relation to the same question, appears to me to be exhibited by his learned editor, an examination of whose singular opinions on some points in the theory of perception, I will reserve for a separate letter.

Before taking leave of Dr. Reid, however, I must not omit to notice his supposition that by subverting as he claims to have done the doctrine of intermediate ideas as separate entities—third things—in perception, he and those who took the same view with him, destroyed Berkeley's theory of Idealism.

This was a great mistake in which he was joined by Dugald Stewart, and to my surprise countenanced, in one part of his comments at least, by Sir Wm. Hamilton.\*

Berkeley fully accorded with Reid that in perception there are only two entities, the percipient and that which is perceived; but while Reid following the common view regarded and called the perceived things, external objects, Berkeley called them ideas, the difference on the part of the latter

\* In reference to a passage in Reid overturning (as that writer declares) the whole ideal system, Sir Wm. Hamilton has the following note:—"It only overturns that Idealism founded on the clumsy hypothesis of ideas being something different, both from the reality they represent, and from the mind contemplating their representation, and which also derives such ideas from without. This doctrine may *subvert the Idealism of Berkeley*, but it even supplies a basis for an Idealism like that of Fichte."—*Reid's Works*, p. 128.

being so far only nominal. The real difference was that he endowed his ideas with several peculiar attributes positive and negative (all fictitious) which could not be predicated of objects; and more especially assumed without any possible proof that in virtue of being ideas (*i. e.* really, in virtue of his calling them ideas) these entities could exist only when perceived. But he never taught that there are *both* objects *and* ideas. The subversion, therefore, (whether due to Reid or not) of the doctrine of intermediate ideas in perception as distinct entities—third things—left Berkeley's theory untouched. This was shown, indeed, by Dr. Thos. Brown. It is now, I think, generally admitted that Dr. Reid did not fully comprehend the theory which he assailed, and he certainly exhibited his misapprehension of it in a way which, it is to be regretted, exposed him to inevitable ridicule.\*

\* I can by no means, however, concur in the judgment pronounced by a recent author, that the Inquiry into the Human Mind "is a very shallow and feeble performance."—See "Locke's Writings and Philosophy," by Edward Tagart, p. 31.

## LETTER IV.

THE DOCTRINES OF SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON REGARDING  
PERCEPTION.

SIR WM. HAMILTON'S doctrines on the subject of perception appear to me even more singular and incongruous with each other than those of Dr. Reid, although they do not manifest the qualities just named on the same points, and the more recent writer seems as unconscious of any inconsistency in what he teaches as his predecessor.

In his edition of the Works of the latter he makes the following dogmatic assertion: "As not here present an immediate knowledge of an object distant in space is impossible."\* Now mark the reason assigned: "For," he continues, "as beyond the sphere of our organs and faculties, it cannot be known by them in itself."

This is surely much like saying "it cannot be known because it cannot be known." What is meant by the sphere of our organs and faculties? To say that a distant object is beyond this sphere, according to the only interpretation of the phrase

\* Works of Dr. Reid, edited by Sir Wm. Hamilton, p. 810.



which I can think of, seems to be at once begging the question.

But the most notable fallacy lurks in the term "immediate" when he affirms "an immediate knowledge of an object distant in space is impossible." He had previously characterized it as "a contradiction in terms."\* A few words will suffice to show that it is neither one nor the other; and that the assertions just quoted involve a confusion of what is physically immediate with what is mentally immediate. As this distinction is exceedingly important I must take some pains to elucidate it.

It is allowed on all hands that a distant object cannot be known without a physical medium between the object and the percipient. In the case of all the senses we can trace the intermediation of physical agents such as light, air, and nerves. Even in cases where the object is in contact with the organ, as in feeling by the touch, the nerves which are always interposed may be strictly regarded as a material medium between the percipient and the object; as a substance, namely, which must be affected before perception ensues, but of whose affections requisite for that end we are insensible.

As all this is, I believe, uncontroverted, as physical intervention is universally admitted, we must consider the author before us to mean that there can

\* Reid's Works, p. 305, note: "An *immediate* perception of things distant is a contradiction in terms."

be no *mentally* immediate knowledge of an object distant in space; *i.e.* no knowledge of it without the intervention of some other act or state or mode of consciousness. Thus Dr. Reid's theory which I have just examined affirms a *mediate* knowledge of external objects inasmuch as he maintains that it comes to us not directly but by means of a state of mind called in his vocabulary "sensation:" and in like manner Sir Wm. Hamilton's doctrine now under consideration must also be construed to affirm an intermediate mental state.

This, however, according to my own personal experience is contrary to fact. As soon as any object is placed before the organs of sight, we see it instantaneously and we see that it is distant from us. We are conscious of no other mental state preceding the perception; and as to the intermediation of light and of our own bodily structure, if a thousand physical actions in them could be traced as interposed, the discovery could not affect the mental act or render it less immediate. The utter incompetence of a knowledge, however complete, of the physical processes concerned in perception to modify the resulting state of consciousness or to alter the object perceived, was shown in a former letter.

Hence if Sir Wm. Hamilton's doctrine that an immediate perception of a distant object is impossible and the assertion of it self-contradictory means physically immediate, the answer is that no

one maintains an immediate perception in that sense : if on the other hand it means mentally immediate, it affirms what is contrary to fact.

There are two theories, certainly, still current, which teach that there is something mental interposed between the object and the percipient.

The first is the theory that we perceive only our own mental states produced by the objects, and have no direct knowledge of the objects themselves ; which although still maintained by several philosophers, is expressly repudiated by the author before us ; and could not be of any avail in the present case, inasmuch as it manifestly includes all objects, proximate as well as remote, the latter of which alone are here in question.

The second is the Theory of Vision, due to the fertile imagination of Berkeley, which insists that we cannot see objects to be distant, but obtain the knowledge of their being so by the intervention of touch, and that the universal conviction of mankind (philosophers excepted) of their seeing objects to be at different distances from each other and from themselves, or rather their perfect freedom from doubt on the subject, is altogether an illusion.

Now as far as the Theory of Vision is concerned, Sir Wm. Hamilton is a Berkeleian, although not a thorough-going one, as I shall show by-and-by ; and in that character must of course maintain that our sight of distant objects as distant is not immediate ; that we seem to ourselves to perceive them visually

to be distant through an association with tactual impressions or conceptions. But if this is consistent in him, he has no grounds for charging others with self-contradiction who maintain the direct and immediate perception of distant visible objects. It is, in truth, a difference about a matter of fact, and involves no self-contradiction any way.

It may be presumed, therefore, that in the passage already quoted Sir Wm. Hamilton had not in view any reference to Berkeley's peculiar theory of vision, and this is confirmed by another consideration to which I shall have shortly to call your attention.

But whether he had or had not any reference to the Berkeleian hypothesis, he is equally mistaken in his award against the direct vision of distant objects. If he *had*, he is wrong in pronouncing that the doctrine of immediate perception, which is a question of fact to be determined by evidence, is a contradiction in terms. If he *had not*, he is wrong in not discriminating the *mentally* immediate and the *physically* immediate; and in transferring the stigma of self-contradiction from a proposition embodying one meaning and maintained by nobody, to a proposition embodying the other meaning, to which the imputation is wholly inapplicable.

And now for the circumstance—an extraordinary feature in the case—to which I have already alluded, and which most clearly and conclusively shows that Berkeley's theory was not in his mind.

While that philosopher denies merely that we see objects to be at any distance from us, Sir Wm. Hamilton in *his* doctrine falls into the still greater extravagance (although it may not be apparent at first) of denying that we perceive distant objects *at all*; and as this must refer principally to perception by sight, it is denying that we *see* such objects in any way. They do not even seem to us, on this hypothesis, to be in the eye or in the mind as Berkeley curiously enough propounds in his Essay. To the sense of sight they are nowhere. At this statement (which doubtless you will think incredible, but which I shall forthwith proceed to confirm) every one will be ready to exclaim, "If we do not see objects which are distant from us, what do we see when such objects are before us? We undeniably see something—what is it?"

The learned author proceeds to enlighten us on this point: he tells us in unmistakable language that the precise object of perception is not any distant reality, "for we are percipient of nothing but what is in proximate contact, in immediate relation with our organs of sense."\*

In another place he is still more explicit and particular, although perhaps at some expense of consistency. "*The total object of visual perception*," he says, "is thus neither the rays in themselves, nor the organ in itself, but the rays and the

\* Reid's Works, p. 814.

living organ in reciprocity : this organ is not, however, to be viewed as merely the retina, but as the whole tract of nervous fibre pertaining to the sense."\*

Now as "the object of visual perception" can be no other than that which we see, this is in fact asserting that we *see* the rays of light, the retina, and the nerves connected with it, all in a state of reciprocity (whatever that may mean); and that we see nothing else : whereas in simple truth, as every one on a moment's reflection must be sensible, we see none of these things, and it is unaccountable how any man of common acuteness could have been betrayed into so glaringly erroneous a statement. It seems almost superfluous to contradict it in detail by saying that this is purely a question of consciousness ; that we are not conscious of perceiving either the rays, or the retina, or the connected tract of nervous fibre, or the rays and the living organ in reciprocity. The man who is totally ignorant of the existence of these physical and physiological facts, sees objects precisely in the same way and quite as well as the philosopher who possesses the greatest amount of knowledge respecting them. Sir William, in other places,

\* Reid's Works, p. 160. Lest it should be supposed that these are merely casual expressions, I refer the reader to the following pages in the same volume, 145, 159, 186, 247, 267, 299, 302, 305, and 810, for passages of similar tenor, the number of them proving that they proceeded from a deliberate theory.

insists that perceiving objects and being conscious of them, are one and the same thing ; yet, in such passages as these, he teaches that we are percipient of things which we have not the slightest consciousness that we perceive ; or, to put it differently, that the majority of human beings in the ordinary exercise of vision perceive and therefore are conscious of, material and organic circumstances the existence of which they never even suspect. Here we have indeed a contradiction in terms.

This extraordinary doctrine is the precursor of other incredible and not altogether congruous or coherent paradoxes. Dr. Reid having remarked that people in general "are firmly persuaded that when ten men look at the sun or the moon, they all see the same individual object," Sir William asserts that "so far from all men who look upon the sun perceiving the same object, in reality every individual in this instance perceives a different object, nay a different object in each several eye."\*

Without stopping to discuss the compatibility or incompatibility of this paradox with the preceding one, I must request you to bear in mind that it is from the pen of a writer who in other parts of the same work strenuously maintains the doctrine which he himself denominates Natural Realism, or in other words the direct or immediate perception of the external world.

\* Reid's Works, p. 814.

Thus his readers who have been led to regard the question of Perception as steadfastly moored by the learned professor and his predecessors in the secure harbour of Natural Realism, find it again set afloat by the very same hand that had assisted in letting go the anchor.

Surely he had not reflected on the extraordinary consequences flowing from the position he has here taken — consequences so obvious, and I may say so monstrous, that I scarcely need to point them out. A few of them may be nevertheless exhibited for your amusement if not edification.

Permit me, however, instead of following up Sir William's resplendent instance of the sun, in managing which his own mental vision seems to have been injuriously affected, "blasted," it may be, "by excess of light," to take the less dazzling and more tractable case of the able professor himself, while engaged in delivering a lecture to his class. According to the strange doctrine under review every pupil directing his eyes to his teacher would perceive a different object. Not being acquainted with the number of pupils who are wise enough to avail themselves of the prelections of so competent an instructor, and numerical accuracy for the purpose in view being unimportant, I will suppose at hazard that there are a hundred watchful disciples present on this hypothetical occasion ; — on which supposition there would be, according to the theory before us, a hundred different objects actually per-



ceived, all wearing the appearance of the professor. For the sake of simplification I will say nothing of the second hundred due to binocular vision; "a different object in each several eye." Now these hundred perceived objects would be either real or not real. If they were real, there would be a hundred actual Sir Williams in the room. If, on the other hand, they were not real, then inasmuch as the whole hundred would, without exception, be in the same predicament, there would not be one real object perceived. The actual Sir William would remain unseen, and might be literally described as disappearing in the crowd.

But in either case how is the theory of a multiplicity of objects to be reconciled with the learned author's position maintained with so much pertinacity that we not only perceive external objects, not only are conscious of perceiving them, but are conscious of the objects themselves; especially if we take it in combination with another doctrine on which, very properly and consistently with his own phraseology, he insists, namely the veracity of consciousness?

According to these combined doctrines pupil A is conscious of perceiving a certain object in the professor's chair, nay is actually conscious of the very professor himself, and the veracity of consciousness being unimpeachable, he must be conscious of the real man, not of any illusive appearance or phantasm: but pupil B, at the same moment

sees a different object in the chair, is conscious of a different professor, and as *his* consciousness is also veracious, there is indisputably a second real man. In this way we are swept along by a logical torrent to the inevitable conclusion that the room contains a hundred veritable Sir Williams.

There is, to be sure, a refuge from these consequences in falling back on our author's definition of a visible object ; but a recourse to that only plunges us into fresh difficulties. We should then have to assume that every pupil instead of seeing the professor at the distance of a few yards, is wholly engaged in perceiving the rays of light reflected upon himself from the lecturer's person together with his own retina and the nervous tract connected with it, all in reciprocity and forming "the total object of visual perception:" *i.e.* he does not see the object before his eyes but perceives and is conscious of things of which at the moment he has no cognizance, of which he may have never heard, and of which the completest ignorance would not render his perception of the lecturer less perfect than it would be with the fullest knowledge.

It is interesting to surmise how so acute and thoughtful a philosopher as the editor of Reid is allowed to be, could have fallen into these transparent fallacies and self-contradictions.

The origin of such mistakes will I think be found, first in his not clearly discerning, or not perhaps uniformly bearing in mind, that the physical pro-

cesses necessary to produce perception are one thing and the mental effect — the perception of the object — is another; that these must ever stand apart as distinct in their nature; and that the latter is entirely unaffected by a knowledge or ignorance of such physical processes, on the part of the percipient: secondly in his not accepting the fact, notwithstanding his Natural Realism, of our perceiving external objects, as a simple and primary act of consciousness not susceptible of any analysis or explanation, whence it is vain attempting to trace any mental event between the percipient and the thing perceived; vain trying to express the fact more simply or fully than by saying that he perceives the object. Sir William, I may add, is not quite original in these extraordinary speculations. Dr. Thos. Brown (whom he had no great disposition to follow) falls into similar aberrations. "There never is," he says, "in the strict philosophic meaning of the phrase, perception of distant things." \* Again, "all which we truly *see* is the light that is present at the retina." †

It is curious that the learned baronet in the passage about every spectator seeing a different object, very closely approximates to those philosophers whom he rightly considers as maintaining a very

\* Sketch of a System of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, p. 128.

† Ibid. p. 146.

unphilosophical theory; I mean (to avail myself of his own nomenclature) the Cosmothetic Idealists.

In proof of this, take a passage from Professor De Morgan's Formal Logic relative to the idea of a horse. I have quoted it in a preceding Letter, but as it is short I will here reproduce it.

"The idea of a horse," he says, "is *the horse in the mind*: and we know no other horse. We admit that there is an external *object*, a horse which may give a *horse in the mind* to twenty different persons; but no one of these twenty knows the object; each one only knows his *idea*. There is an object because each of the twenty persons receives an idea without communicating with the others: so that there is something external to give it them. But when they talk about it, under the name of a horse, they talk about their ideas."\*

The difference between the two philosophers is soon told: while one of them would maintain that when twenty men look at a horse each man perceives a different *object*; whence there would ensue an arithmetical result of twenty objects: the other would insist that *no* object is seen but that every man has in his mind a different *idea*; whence there would be a sum total of twenty ideas.

It is clear, however, that on both theories the horse himself would not be perceived: he would walk, trot, or gallop over the ground in complete invisibility.

\* Page 30.

Hence I cannot for my own part divine how Sir William can possibly escape being ranked (as far at least as vision is concerned) with the Cosmothetic Idealists or Hypothetical Realists, unless, indeed, he may please to shelter himself under the appellation of Cosmothetic Organist — one who holds that we do not perceive ideas but organs, played upon (I am not punning) by rays of light; and thence comes to know in some inexplicable way that there is an external world of invisible objects.

I have already adverted to the language employed by the author on whom I am commenting, in reference to our perception of an external world. He maintains the correctness and propriety of saying that we are conscious of the objects themselves.\* This appears to me, I confess, an innovation in language at once needless, at variance with custom, and repugnant to good taste.

When we say we are conscious of anything, we mean that it is a state or act or mode of consciousness. Thus we are conscious of joy or sorrow, of a pain in the head, of remembering a beautiful landscape, of hearing the song of a blackbird: in other words joy and sorrow and pain and remembering and hearing, are modes of consciousness, or mental phenomena.

So we are conscious of seeing a tree: *i.e.* seeing

\* "The assertion," he says, "that we can be conscious of an act of knowledge without being conscious of its object, is virtually suicidal." — *Discussions on Philosophy*, p. 47.

a tree is a state of consciousness. But if, conforming to Sir Wm. Hamilton's phraseology, we were to say, "we are conscious of the tree," it would be tantamount to calling the tree itself a state of consciousness, which would not only be at variance with custom but would set aside an important distinction.

To explain: while all the operations and affections of the mind may be designated as modes of consciousness, it is only some of them that can be spoken of as having *objects*; nor can we always use the latter phrase in precisely the same sense.

We may, for example, speak of an idea being the object of conception or contemplation, but in this case the object admits of being only verbally or logically discriminated from the operation; it has no distinct existence, but forms an integrant part of the mental affection, and thus we may be said to be conscious of it.

This is true of all objects spoken of as actually present to the mind except in the single but very comprehensive case of perceiving through the organs of sense, of which the objects are external things—things which are present to the mind but being separate entities are not states of consciousness, although the perception of them comes under that appellation; and, consequently, it cannot be said with any correctness that we are conscious of them. We are not conscious of anything which has a distinct existence from ourselves; we simply

perceive it. It may, it is true, be said that this is only a question about terms, whether we shall generalise the word 'conscious' in a greater or less degree; but even were this admitted, nothing is to be gained by such a generalization, while the power of marking an important distinction would be lost as well as both usage and taste contravened.

Before closing these strictures on Sir Wm. Hamilton's views regarding Perception, it may be worth while to take a passing glance at some points in his opinions on the subject of Berkeley's Theory of Vision, to which I have already alluded.

I have remarked that he is by no means a thorough follower of Berkeley in that extraordinary speculation. In the first place, he allows the possibility, nay the probability, of our seeing objects to be *external*\* without the aid of touch; which Berkeley altogether denies. At the same time he asserts that the knowledge we have of distance through the eye is *in a great measure* acquired; which is allowing that it is in *some measure* natural: an admission also totally at variance with the original hypothesis. He likewise acknowledges that the theory is "*provokingly found totally at fault*" † (his own phrase) in the case of the lower animals; "for we find," he adds, "that all the animals who possess at birth the power of regulated

\* Reid's Works, p. 177, note.

† Ibid. 182.

motion (and these are those only through whom the truth of the theory can be brought to the test of a decisive experiment) possess also from birth the whole apprehension of distance, &c., which they are ever known to exhibit." \*

It is marvellous that after such admissions, a sagacious metaphysician like Sir Wm. Hamilton should cling to the traditionary philosophic faith of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for they amount in reality to a surrender of the whole theory.

The position which Berkeley takes is, that it is *impossible* for an object to be seen either as external or as distant; assigning a reason which, if relevant at all, applies to the organs of vision in the lower animals with as much cogency as to the eyes of mankind.

It is not, therefore, as Sir William makes it, a question of degree but a question of absolute possibility or impossibility: and the admission that we can see an inch before us upsets the whole doctrine. Nor is it against the eye as *human* that Berkeley alleges the incapacity to see distance; but against the eye as a peculiar organ adapted to the reception of rays of light falling upon it in right lines, and which, as fitted for its special functions, has, to say the least, no superior excellence in man to that manifested by it amongst many of the lower

\* Reid's Works, p. 182.



animals. The reason alluded to—which is the only one given by Berkeley—is, I grant, and as I have shown in another place\*, exceedingly weak, unmeaning, and confused, and has really no applicability to the matter which it is intended to prove: but such as it is, if it is good against the human organ of vision, it is good against all organs of vision whatever. The parity of the two cases has, indeed, been slighted or hurried over by the defenders of the good bishop, but any one who takes the trouble to scrutinize the argument, will see the asserted parity at once and that it is fatal to the theory.

Adam Smith without discerning this inevitable conclusion, made the same admission with regard to sight in the lower animals that Sir Wm. Hamilton confesses himself to have conceded with so much unphilosophical reluctance. Who in truth at all acquainted with such facts as the following can possibly avoid it?

“Sight,” says Cuvier, “is extremely perfect in birds, and they have the peculiar faculty of seeing objects near and distant equally well. The means by which this is effected are not satisfactorily explained, though a power of changing the convexity of the eye is probably the proximate cause. Like all other physical peculiarities, it is admirably adapted to the mode of existence of the class; a

\* Review of Berkeley's Theory of Vision; also Theory of Reasoning, Appendix.

quick and perfect sight of objects and perception of distances is necessary to the rapidity of movements and the securing of their prey to birds.”\*

It is afterwards said of eagles in the same work, that their admirable power of vision enables them “to distinguish their prey at an immense distance, and they rush upon it with the velocity of an arrow.”†

Just indulge your imagination for a moment in the exquisite supposition that the eagle learns distances by the touch!

If I have appeared to bestow too much time and labour in setting forth these erroneous views (as I conceive them to be) I must allege the high authority of the author on whom I am commenting in justification of the pains I have taken in pointing them out. Any confusion and inconsistency in a writer of his reputation must tend to produce a painful kind of perplexity in the mind of the earnest student. A philosopher of mature reflection may be able to detect such incongruities, and to divine their sources, and will at all events experience little disturbance from them in his own well-considered views; but it is in the process of education chiefly that the work on which I have animadverted is likely to be studied; and it is the young mind eager after knowledge that has to be guarded from embarrassment.

\* Cuvier's *Animal Kingdom*, translated by Ed. Griffith, vol. vi. p. 102.

† Page 223.

## LETTER V.

GENERAL AND ABSTRACT IDEAS AND TERMS, AS TREATED  
BY BERKELEY, HUME, AND OTHER WRITERS OF A  
MORE RECENT DATE.

I PROMISED in a preceding letter to furnish some proof that the philosophers who had in recent times maintained, more decidedly perhaps than any others, the non-existence of general and abstract ideas, had not, while so doing, steered altogether clear of inconsistencies and inaccuracies, or, at any rate, infelicities of exposition.

In attempting to fulfil the promise, I give precedence to the distinguished author of "A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge."

Berkeley, while denying general and abstract ideas as commonly understood, still teaches that a particular idea may become general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort, just in the same way as a proper name may become general.\*

Surely there is here a want of due discrimination.

\* Introduction to the Principles of Human Knowledge, sect. 12.

The reason he assigns for the application of the epithet "general" to an idea, namely, that it represents other ideas, would not be valid even if the description of its function as *representative* were correct: and further, if the epithet were allowed to be appropriate, the meaning of it could not be the same, the case being a totally different one from the generalization of a name to which he likens it. The justness of this objection will be more clearly seen if we consider that the term "general," when applied to names, means "common," or belonging in common to the individuals of a genus or class.

A proper name may undoubtedly lose its particularity and become common or general by being given to more objects than one, and will then belong alike to each object: but a particular idea can never in any analogous sense be applied to other particular ideas or belong to them in common, and therefore cannot become general in the same sense as a name becomes so.

Moreover, if an idea can with any propriety be called general because, as alleged, it represents a class, so may an object; for an object actually perceived may represent other objects (whatever may be meant by the process so designated) just as well as an idea can represent other ideas: both stand in the same relation (however it may be described) to the other individuals of their respective classes.

It is curious enough that Berkeley himself, with apparent unconsciousness of what he is doing, asserts the same thing; for while attempting to show how an *idea* may become general by this kind of representation, he is actually engaged in showing how an *object*, and incidentally a *name*, may become general.

"Now," he says, "if we will annex a meaning to our words, and speak only of what we can conceive, I believe that we shall acknowledge that an idea which, considered in itself, is particular, becomes general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort. To make this plain by an example, suppose a geometrician is demonstrating the method of cutting a line in two equal parts. He draws, for instance, a black line of an inch in length; this, which in itself is a particular line, is nevertheless, with regard to its signification, general, since, as it is there used, it represents all particular lines whatsoever; so that what is demonstrated of it, is demonstrated of all lines, or, in other words, of a line in general. And as that particular line becomes general by being made a sign, so the name *line*, which taken absolutely is particular, by being a sign is made general. And as the former owes its generality, not to its being the sign of an abstract or general line, but of all particular right lines that may possibly exist; so the latter must be thought to derive its

generality from the same cause, namely, the various lines which it indifferently denotes."\*

Here you will observe we have general objects, general ideas, and general names, and all asserted to be general in the same sense and from the same cause.

Yet it surely is anomalous and tends to confusion to talk of a general line, *i. e.* a *general object*, to call it general for no other reason really than its belonging to a class and possessing qualities similar to those possessed by the other individuals of the class: and it seems to me equally anomalous to speak of a *general idea* on account of its being in the same predicament.

Such language may have arisen from the circumstance which occasionally happens, that when a general term is in familiar use some one particular idea is called up by it more readily than others: but this, which is merely incidental, does not divest the idea of its particularity (if I may speak of an inconceivable process) nor does it remove a formidable objection to the expression that the particular idea represents the rest. The term "represent" is already pre-occupied in this connexion, and has a strictly definite meaning: in common metaphysical language an idea represents the object of which it is the copy, and to apply the phrase as Berkeley does is to render it ambiguous.

\* Principles of Human Knowledge, Introduction, sect. 12.

At all events, if the terms "general" and "represent" are to be employed in these senses by metaphysicians on account of the poverty of philosophical language, let it be clearly understood that each of them is also used in another perfectly distinct acceptation. So long as the double meaning is fully borne in mind, no great evil may ensue; but still the simpler and more effectual way of avoiding the risk of ambiguity is, I venture to think, restricting each of the words to one signification.\*

Hume, who substantially agrees with Berkeley, contributes to the explanation of his predecessor the somewhat inconsistent addition that an idea becomes general by being annexed to a general term—which certainly does not mend the matter. It is much like saying that when a private individual consigns his affairs to a general agent who is employed perhaps by fifty others, he by so doing becomes himself in some way or other "general:" that he contracts that quality by placing his con-

\* This employment of the word general is in truth an instance of that transfer of terms which the reader will find explained in a subsequent letter in reference to the epithet necessary. Should I be able to complete a third series of these Letters, some of them would probably take up the subject of language again at greater length, with the view of showing, amongst other things, the unsuspected variety of modes in which the same word is applied, and the erroneous inferences which unavoidably ensue.

cerns in the hands of one to whom it may be appropriately attributed.

Turn the matter as you please, you will find that a general idea is a solecism—except in the sense of an idea generally entertained, or present to the minds of a number of individuals, which is an application of the epithet not here in question.

It may be worth while observing that Berkeley prefers the term *notion* to that of *idea* in certain cases, and, amongst the rest, in the case of “the relations and habitudes between things:” which seems to be in some measure an anticipation of the views and language of Dr. Thomas Brown, who exhibits the same preference. It would be digressing too far to consider the accuracy or propriety or consistency of such a distinction in the hands of the former.\* To me he appears by it to depart from his previous doctrine.

Dr. Thomas Brown, both in his Lectures and in the Inquiry into the relation of Cause and Effect, which may be considered as containing his mature and revised opinions, coincides with Berkeley and Hume in denying general and abstract ideas as usually held: but he at the same time insists that we have *general notions*. In his explanation of what he means by these, he is not very precise. Sometimes he calls them “feelings of resemblance.” Thus, after remarking that the term *quadruped*

\* See Principles of Human Knowledge, particularly section 142.



would not have been invented if we had not felt that particular relation of similarity which it denotes, he proceeds : " The feeling of this resemblance, in certain respects, is the true general notion or general idea, as it has been less properly called, which the corresponding general term expresses." \* Again he speaks of it as " that general notion of the relation of similarity in certain respects which is signified by the general term,—and," he adds, (giving us another equivalent for general notion) " without *which relative suggestion*, as a previous state of mind, the general term would as little have been invented as the names of John and William would have been invented, if there had been no perception of any individual being whatever to be denoted by them." † In the immediately subsequent passage he tells us, " that we have general relative feelings of the resemblances of objects, and that our general terms are significant of these," ‡ adding, " and limited, therefore, to the particular objects which excite some common feelings of resemblance."

In the whole of the explanation of which these extracts form a part, there is an obvious looseness of phraseology and confusion of several things which ought to be carefully discriminated, while there is at the same time, it must be admitted, a display of no little acuteness and ingenuity.

Nothing, surely, can be gained except indistinct-

\* Lectures, vol. ii. p. 486.

† Ibid. p. 512.

‡ Ibid.

ness by making an intellectual act into an emotional affection, as he does when he transmutes "general notions" into "feelings of resemblance" or rather when he gives us these two phrases as equivalent expressions. Where is the advantage of saying we *feel* things to be related instead of we *perceive* or *discern* them to be so? \* And in his frequent definitions of the meaning of a general term, he is not content with confusing notions and feelings by making it signify "a general notion" or "feeling of resemblance," but sometimes he tells us it is the name which we give "to the circumstances of felt resemblance." †

The general term *man*, he afterwards says, expresses "briefly those very general circumstances of resemblance which we discover in all the individuals to whom that name is given." ‡

Thus he describes a general term as signifying three really different things, a notion, a feeling, and a set of circumstances, whereas it cannot be said in accurate language to signify any of these. A general term such as *man* denotes, in truth, neither a general notion, nor a feeling of resemblance, nor the circumstances of resemblance, but the objects which resemble each other: it is the common name of the

\* This phraseology appears to have sprung from a reluctance general amongst philosophers to regard *perceiving* as a primal fact: there seems not to be the same difficulty with respect to *feeling*, although both are really on a level.

† Lectures, vol. ii. p. 506.

‡ Ibid. p. 507.

individuals of a class. Dr. Brown, in these and other passages, confounds the reason for which the name is given with the object on which it is bestowed.

The observations which I before made on the application of the word general to "ideas" by Berkeley and Hume, are equally relevant to Dr. Brown's application of it to "notions" or "feelings of resemblance." The epithet in question, which has a definite and appropriate meaning when used to characterise a word, or even a quality, cannot be employed in the same acceptation to characterise a notion or idea.

The impropriety of such language is perhaps more strikingly manifest, when he uses "common" in place of "general," as he sometimes does. He speaks of "a common feeling of relation," which means, in accurate phraseology, "a feeling common to mankind or to a number of individuals;" whereas he intends by the expression to intimate not that the *feeling* is common to a number of percipient beings, but that the *relation* is common to a number of objects perceived.

I may add that, like Berkeley, he mingles objects and ideas. His general notions would have been more appropriately named *general perceptions*, and consist in *perceiving* or feeling resemblances in *objects*; they are—at least in the outset—primary states of mind, not secondary, not representative: in Hume's language they are impressions, not ideas, and appear to me to approach in some respects to

Dugald Stewart's simple ideas discussed in a preceding letter.

This interpretation is borne out by what he says in his Inquiry into the relation of Cause and Effect.

"We may," he affirms, "have original feelings that are faint and remembrances that are far more lively. Our notions of equality, difference, proportion, for example, are not copies of any former feelings : they are new feelings that arise in the mind on the contemplation of certain forms : but our conceptions of the beautiful forms themselves which we may have been comparing, are, as mere feelings or states of mind, not less, but more lively than *the notions of relation*, which we cannot regard as copies of former states of mind, and must therefore consider as themselves, in Mr. Hume's sense of the word, Impressions." \*

What Dr. Brown here calls "feelings that arise in the mind on the contemplation of certain forms" seem (as already intimated) very much the same alleged mental phenomena as Dugald Stewart's "ideas" which "necessarily arise in the human understanding, when employed in the exercise of its different faculties." †

The simple truth, according to my view, as I must take the liberty of reminding you, is that equality, difference, proportion, and other similar words, are merely abstract terms, not representing

\* Page 270.

† Philosophical Essays.

any detached or separable qualities or ideas, but signifying only that the objects in which they are said to reside are equal, different, proportionate, and so on. When we say that we perceive two lines to be equal, we express the whole of the fact : we do not perceive *also* the equality of the lines. Both phrases mean the same thing and no more.

In the exposition of this subject by a still more recent writer, Jamès Mill, there is much worth the attention of the student. He nevertheless falls, as it appears to me, into several important errors. Two of them I will briefly indicate.

1. He teaches that a general term (such as man) not only calls up the ideas of an indefinite number of individual objects, but forms all these ideas into one very complex and indistinct idea\*: a process of which I myself am quite unconscious—nay, which I find it impossible to conceive.

2. He spoils his exposition of abstraction by introducing into it another process of which I am equally unconscious, and which I am equally incapable of conceiving, namely, what he styles “dropping the connotation.” He maintains that the difference between concrete and abstract terms consists in this dropping of the connotation, and he illustrates his position by the abstract word TIME. After stating that the past is “an infinity of simultaneous successions, each having antecedents, running back without end,” he proceeds:

\* Analysis of the Human Mind, vol. i. p. 207.

"These are successions in the concrete: successions of objects. Drop the connotation to form the abstract, as is done in other cases; you have then *successions without the objects*; which is precisely the meaning of the word TIME."\* But if we leave out the objects, what is there left to precede and follow? How can there be successions, or how can we think of successions, without things succeeding each other? "Dropping the connotation" in this way is obviously impossible. The plain fact underlying this erroneous description seems to be that when the abstract word *time* is used, it does not necessarily raise up the ideas of any specific set of objects succeeding each other but sometimes of one set of objects sometimes of another. An object or objects nevertheless there assuredly must be, actual or conceived. In Mr. Mill's account of the matter the doctrine of abstract ideas seems to be restored.

A living writer, no degenerate successor of the one last named, who has given to the world an instructive System of Logic, containing, however, much that is questionable in psychology including the theory of reasoning, presents us with several valuable passages on the subject under review, in his at once "luminous" and "voluminous" work†: yet he sometimes uses expressions relative

\* Analysis of the Human Mind, vol. ii. p. 118.

† An allusion to the well-known anecdote of Sheridan and Gibbon. In coming out of Westminster Hall on one of the days

to it, against which some of the preceding objections may be brought, and in which I find myself unable to concur; and since he tells us that there are undoubtedly such things as "general conceptions,"\* I am not sure that he would assent to the unqualified proposition, as I have maintained it, that there are absolutely none but representative ideas, and that as there are no general or abstract objects or events, whether physical or mental, all our ideas, notions, and conceptions are in fact, and must be of necessity, representative of particular phenomena.

Hence, in my view, all the general and abstract ideas, notions, and conceptions, which make so great a figure in speculation, are mere fictions, and the terms which are regarded as denoting them, highly useful and important and indispensable as they are, can raise up in the mind none but particular representations, and are only expedients, although most valuable expedients, of language. Our idea of life is nothing but the idea of something living; of truth, but of something true; of causation, but of something causing; of time, but of something lasting; of space, but of something extended.

of Hastings's trial, the latter thanked the former for having complimented his historical work in the presence of the whole British nation there virtually assembled, by styling it "the luminous page of Gibbon:" whereupon Sheridan, with characteristic humour, whispered aside to a friend, "I said voluminous."

\* A System of Logic, by J. S. Mill, vol. ii. p. 213.

## LETTER VI.

GENERAL PROPOSITIONS: THEIR FORMATION AND  
CHARACTER.

HAVING discussed at sufficient length the subject of general terms, I will now proceed to that of the general propositions in which they are employed, and which you will find to be connected with several doctrines of greater renown than solidity.

Take any general proposition you please, and on examination you will discern that it consists in predicating a quality or attribute or circumstance of every individual member of some class; in other words, it consists in asserting that all things which possess one quality or one set of qualities, or agree in one or more points, also possess another quality, or another set of qualities, or agree in another point or other points.

It is the assertion of resemblance between things in at least two respects.

Thus, when it is said that all fixed stars twinkle, the proposition asserts that those celestial luminaries which resemble each other in being fixed also resemble each other in the circumstance of twinkling.



Simple as the instance may appear, it suffices to illustrate both what a general proposition is, and what is necessary before it can be formed.

The formation of the proposition here adduced, as well as the understanding of its import, requires a knowledge of what stars are, what being fixed is, and what twinkling is, all which particulars are such as can be learned only through the organs of sense.

I might furnish you with abundance of additional examples in illustration, were they needed on so plain a matter.

When it is affirmed that water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen in certain proportions, an assertion is made that all portions of matter having the collective properties on account of which we give the name of water, will be found on analysis to yield the two gases just mentioned in uniform proportions : that all portions of matter resembling each other in the former set of properties, also resemble each other in the later property or set of properties.

The several particulars necessary to be known before such a proposition can be either formed or fully understood, it would be superfluous to do more than glance at ; such as the various qualities of water, the properties of oxygen and hydrogen, and the nature of chemical union and chemical decomposition.

What I particularly wish to insist upon is the

absolute indispensableness of a knowledge of certain particulars, each to be acquired through the appropriate channel, before any general proposition whatever can be formed or the ideas expressed in it be present to the mind: a position plain enough, one would think, to dispense with formal enunciation, but not so plain, we shall presently see, as to escape controversy and denial.

The propositions I have hitherto considered are in their nature contingent; but general mathematical and other self-evident or demonstrable propositions, notwithstanding what has been maintained to the contrary, do not differ in the characteristics here described from other general propositions. They predicate resemblance or agreement in at least two respects, just in the same way as the rest; and they can be formed only from individual instances, or (what that implies) from a knowledge of particular facts perceived through the organs of sense.

The difference between them and contingent propositions is not in the mode of their formation, not in any exemption from the indispensableness of perceptible facts, but in the circumstance that the facts which they express are of a different order, namely, of the kind termed necessary—a term on which I shall have more to say hereafter—so that to deny the propositions affirming the facts would not only involve a contradiction in words, but imply the absurdity of thinking a certain fact

to be true and false, to exist and not to exist, at the same time.

If we take an example, the subject will be rendered clearer to those readers who have not before thought about it: let it be the proposition, "parallel lines never meet although indefinitely prolonged."

As a general proposition, this is an assertion that certain things—lines—agreeing in one respect—being parallel—agree also in another respect—never meeting.

Moreover, it is a proposition which could be formed only from knowing individual instances of parallel lines, of lines meeting, and of lines being prolonged—circumstances none of which could be learned except through the organs of perception, all of them being nothing else than physical objects or physical facts.

Having learned these things, we discern, or may discern, on reflection, (for such truths do not necessarily force themselves on the mind) that there would be a contradiction in supposing any parallel lines whatever to meet, inasmuch as with the slightest tendency to meet they would cease to be parallel.

The circumstance of being parallel and the circumstance of not meeting are necessary co-existing facts or conditions, the former of which cannot have place or be conceived to have place without the latter. But they are nevertheless physical or

material facts with which we become acquainted through our bodily organs, although certain writers appear to regard mathematical knowledge as concerned with something beyond matter; something transcending the sphere of the senses.

So far as to what we perceive in the world without us and the general propositions formed respecting external objects: let us next glance at what concerns the world within us. It would at first sight seem scarcely to need insisting upon, although it is requisite to bring the truth into view on account of some doctrines at variance with it, that general propositions respecting modes of consciousness or operations and affections of the mind, are not at all different in their nature from other general propositions, and can be formed only in the same way.

As we give common names, such as reasoning, willing, hoping, rejoicing, to the modes in which the mind operates and is affected, from discerning resemblances and differences between individual mental operations and affections, so we form general propositions regarding these mental states from a number of individual facts in which they are concerned.

For example, we designate instances in which the mind operates in a certain way by the common name reasoning in consequence of having known repeated operations of that sort; and we form the general proposition "reasoning is liable to error,"

from having known mistakes committed in the process.

Thus for this one general proposition, for the formation as well as the comprehension of it, we must know what reasoning is, what an error in reasoning is, and what "being liable" is.

From the considerations now adduced, it is clear that in physical, mathematical, and mental science alike, general propositions are formed from a particular knowledge of the things they comprehend, and are of the same nature in regard to asserting two points of agreement in every one of the things comprehended.

One important conclusion flowing from this truth is that what are termed maxims, or axioms, or first principles, inasmuch as they are all general propositions belonging to one or other of the three classes specified, cannot possibly, as some eminent philosophers have maintained, be brought with us into the world, or, in other words, be innate.

If a knowledge of the individual facts comprehended by them is indispensable to their being formed, the maxims could not be said, without self-contradiction, to be in existence till the particular facts constituting their very substance had become known.

To see the strange doctrine of innate maxims in its true light, we must carefully note one important distinction: we must steadfastly keep in view the essential difference between the general propositions

themselves and the circumstance of human beings or the human mind being so constituted as to form them when certain occasions arise.

It is undoubtedly one of the natural or constitutional modes of mental procedure in beings like ourselves, possessing articulate speech, to form general propositions, laws, principles, or maxims, whichever you may choose to call them, when the requisite objects and facts are before the mind or have come under its cognizance; just as it is natural to discern the objects and facts themselves and the points of resemblance on which the general propositions are grounded.

The aptitude to generalize, as well as to discern resemblances and differences, being part of our very nature, it may, if any one chooses, (although the phrase is not very happy) be called innate, the epithet when so used being synonymous with natural or constitutional: but the results of this part of the mental constitution, namely, the general propositions formed, cannot be innate for the simple reason that they are necessarily posterior to the knowledge of the particular facts comprehended in them.

In the same way, remembering the objects we have seen is a natural or constitutional mode of mental action, but cannot have place till we have seen some objects to remember: and it is surely quite obvious that the constitutional aptitude to form general propositions no more brings

with it the knowledge of particular facts without which general propositions are impossible, than the capacity of remembering brings with it a knowledge of the objects which must be known before they can be remembered.

If this letter should appear to be engaged in laying down some doctrines sufficiently trite, you will please to recollect that the distinctions drawn in it are often overlooked, and to consider it as expressly intended to clear the way for what follows.

## LETTER VII.

GENERAL PROPOSITIONS (IN CONTINUATION). COMPARISON OF THE INNATE PRINCIPLES OF LEIBNITZ AND THE *A PRIORI* COGNITIONS OF KANT.

IN discussing at so much length as I have done, and purpose to do, the nature and formation of general propositions, I have been influenced less by any natural difficulty in the subject than by the factitious importance given to it by the doctrines of several philosophers of distinguished reputation; some of whom have taught, as I have already intimated, that certain general truths are born with us; while others, dropping or disclaiming any such term as innate and what is implied in it, affirm that such truths spring up in the mind independently of the perception of external objects, but still on occasion of perceiving them: — theories which, how variously soever they may be expressed, do not, in my opinion, essentially differ, and are obnoxious to the same refutation; although the second is less palpably wide of the truth than the first.

Locke, as I scarcely need mention, opened his masterly Essay on Human Understanding, by combating a doctrine of this sort; namely, that the



human mind is endowed with innate practical and speculative principles; and he did it so successfully as to create a wonder, on my part at least, that anything of the kind should have since re-appeared.

Yet Leibnitz, in his latest commentary on Locke's Essay, contends in the most express terms for innate ideas and innate principles, overlooking or not duly appreciating, as I think, the scope and force of our distinguished countryman's reasoning against them.

On the question whether the mind is a *tabula rasa* as maintained, according to him, by Aristotle and Locke, Leibnitz professes to believe with Plato that "the soul contains originally the principles of several notions and doctrines which external objects merely awake on certain occasions." "The Stoics," he adds, "called these principles *common notions*, *Prolepses*, i. e. fundamental assumptions, or what we take for granted beforehand. The Mathematicians call them *common notions* (*κοινὰς ἐννοίας*)."\*

He afterwards very explicitly repeats, "that there are ideas and principles which do not come to us from the senses, and which we find in ourselves without forming them, although the senses furnish the occasions of our perceiving them."

It has been sometimes asserted that the author of the Essay on Human Understanding was needlessly engaged in his preliminary Chapters with

\* Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humain, Avant-Propos.

combating fallacies no longer in existence, and I once, I confess, thought so myself; but here we have positive proof of their dominion over one of the master-spirits of the age, although professing to be critically acquainted with Locke's able reasoning against them, which, in fact, he sets himself to contest argument by argument.

No one who reads the New Essays on the Human Understanding can doubt that Leibnitz was a thorough, if not always a consistent, advocate of innate ideas and innate principles in the extreme sense of that term.

It is surprising that his views on this point have attracted so little notice, and that Kant's doctrine relating to it, which is in many respects the same, although less clearly and decisively expressed, should have attracted so much. The cognitions *a priori* of the latter have many points of agreement with Leibnitz's innate principles, as the following comparison of their doctrines will show.

#### LEIBNITZ.

The soul contains originally the principles of several notions and doctrines, which external objects merely awake on certain occasions.

There are ideas and principles that do not come to us from the senses, and which we find in ourselves without forming them, although the senses furnish the occasion of perceiving them.

#### KANT.

Cognitions *a priori* are such as are absolutely independent of experience; and even of all impressions of the senses. But the faculty of cognition is awakened into exercise through objects which affect our senses.

## LEIBNITZ.

All the examples which confirm a general truth, however numerous, are not sufficient to establish the universal necessity of this same truth.

Even if the maxims "*what-ever is, is*" and "*a thing cannot be and not be at the same time,*" should not be known, they would not cease to be innate because they are recognised as soon as they are understood.

All Arithmetic and all Geometry are innate.

That the square is not a circle is an innate truth.

## KANT.

Experience teaches us that something is constituted in such and such a manner, but not that it could not be otherwise.

Necessity and strict universality are sure characteristics of a cognition *a priori*.

The axioms of mathematics are judgments or cognitions *a priori*.

Pure mathematical propositions are at all times judgments *a priori*, because they carry along with them necessity, which can never be obtained from experience.

The science of Mathematics affords us a striking example how far we can advance in cognition *a priori* independent of experience.

So far there is little difference to be discerned between the doctrines of these philosophers except a difference in expression. They both come nearly to the same thing. Leibnitz terms his principles innate, but still represents them as not perceived until the occasion is furnished by the senses, until they are awakened by external objects. Kant designates his cognitions by the epithet *a priori*, and disclaiming to mean by this phrase "previous to any impressions on the senses," likewise describes them as awakened or developed into perceptible existence through objects by which the senses are affected.

The important feature in the matter is that the innate principles of the one philosopher and the cognitions *a priori* of the other, are both described as not derived in any way from the senses, but on the contrary as having a perfectly independent origin ; and since they are alike asserted, notwithstanding this independence, not to be awakened or come into cognisable existence until the senses are exercised, there is, it is clear, a close correspondence between them. Kant nevertheless avoids, as far as I can find, the epithet inborn, and does not equally expose himself to the charge of glaring inconsistency by directly maintaining the existence of knowledge when nothing is known, while Leibnitz, in such passages as the following, boldly asserts it. "There are ideas and principles which do not come to us from the senses, and which we find in ourselves without forming them."

There is at the outset one fatal objection to both these doctrines. Not only are we utterly unconscious of any such alleged innate principles and *a priori* cognitions (although if they exist at all they must be matters of consciousness), but when they are presented to us in words, we find that it is in the shape of propositions expressive of nothing but knowledge which has been acquired through the organs of sense, and which cannot be acquired in any other way.\*

\* The question is here treated, for the sake of simplicity, in reference to external objects alone, but the arguments apply *mutatis mutandis* to mental phenomena.

The doctrines in question are, in truth, at once overturned by a consideration of the nature of general propositions as set forth in my last letter. Innate principles and *a priori* cognitions are alike general propositions, or, if you prefer the description, they are portions of knowledge which general propositions enunciate, and it is impossible, as I have shown in the letter referred to, that any such propositions (whatever their matter may be) can be formed except from particular instances. I shall hereafter examine the attributes of these maxims, on account of which they cannot, it is alleged, be formed from experience; but at present I have solely to do with their character as affirmative of properties belonging to a class.

A general proposition being, as already explained, nothing more or less than an assertion that every individual thing which possesses one quality or collection of qualities, also possesses another, we cannot know the truth or even the meaning of such a proposition respecting external objects (to confine the question, for the sake of simplicity, to outward things) without discerning at the time, or having formerly discerned through the organs of sense, some individual objects in possession of the two qualities combined.

Hence if certain principles are innate, as taught by Leibnitz, or if cognitions *a priori* arise in the mind independently of perception, as taught by Kant, we are driven to one of two suppositions, either that knowledge may exist without something

being known, or that there must be some other mode of obtaining a knowledge of such external facts as are embodied in any maxim than perceiving them through the organs of sense.

1. The first of these suppositions, although expressly asserted in Leibnitz's doctrine and implicitly in that of Kant, is manifestly self-contradictory, since knowledge presupposes consciousness, and cannot have place without both a knower in activity as such and something known, just as perceiving, which is immediate knowledge through the organs of sense, cannot have place, according to the explanation given in a former letter, without both an actual percipient being and an object perceived.

This I am aware may be denied. "Knowledge," it may be said, "continually exists without consciousness, since the greater part of the knowledge which we possess is, at any given moment, not present to the mind but latent:" an argument employed by Leibnitz himself to vindicate his innate principles. But what are the real facts, stated without figure or hypothesis? They are these, that things which we have before known (it would be tautology to add consciously) recur spontaneously to the mind or come back to us on the use of certain expedients. We call this the possession of knowledge, and the phrase, as it is commonly understood, very conveniently indicates what really happens, although, like many other compendious expressions which must not be literally construed,

it does so in a defective and elliptical manner : but as the knowledge in such cases is always the revival of the ideas of things with which we had previously become acquainted, it is in an essentially different predicament from that of the alleged original innate knowledge, of which nobody is or ever has been aware.

Knowledge, correctly speaking, can no more exist in a latent state, *i.e.* without the conscious act of knowing, than flying as in the instance of a bird, can exist when, instead of moving through the air, the bird is quietly perched upon a tree.

When an intelligent being is said to possess latent knowledge, nothing more can be truly signified than that he is in a condition which ensures or admits the revival of what he has previously known.\* This condition, whatever it may be in itself, manifestly cannot be predicated of any one whose organs of sense have not been exercised. There can be no innate latent knowledge in any way.

2. The second hypothesis of which it would be difficult to find an express upholder, must also fall

\* There is an ambiguity in the word knowledge similar to that formerly pointed out in the word perception, for which I beg to refer you to the Twelfth Letter in my First Series. I shall content myself with saying here, that "knowledge" sometimes means the objects or facts known, considered as known, and sometimes the mental act or state of knowing. In each of these senses, nevertheless, both the object and the act are implied.

to the ground unless those who may attempt to support it can point out some external objects which have come to their knowledge without having been perceived through the organs of sense. To be sure even this might be maintained by any one who thinks with Plato that we bring into the world with us reminiscences of a former existence:—a matter which may be safely left to Wordsworth and the poets.\*

The conclusion from all this is plain.

If individual external objects cannot be known except through the organs of the senses, the agreement of such objects with each other in two or more respects, or what is expressed in a general proposition, cannot be known except through the

- \* "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting ;  
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar ;  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God who is our home :  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy !  
Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing boy ;  
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
He sees it in his joy ;  
The youth who daily farther from the east  
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,  
And by the vision splendid  
Is on his way attended ;  
At length the man perceives it die away,  
And fade into the light of common day."

*Wordsworth.*



same medium, and hence innate principles and cognitions *a priori* independent of impressions on the senses or experience are impossible.

Should it be urged, in objection, that I have not fairly represented what these two philosophers mean when they employ the terms innate principles and cognitions *a priori*, I can truly say that if I have misconceived them, I shall be most heartily glad to be set right. I have taken these expressions, it may be said, to denote general propositions, whereas they signify something quite different. Let us see. With regard to the word principle, as employed by Leibnitz, I cannot understand by it anything else than either an act or portion of knowledge, or a proposition exhibiting or expressing in words an act or portion of knowledge. He himself speaks of general maxims and principles as being equivalent.\*

If he intended by the term an act or portion of knowledge, then the argument that there can be no knowledge without some particular objects known, at once applies, and he is landed in a contradiction.

If he intended by it a proposition expressive of a portion of knowledge, the same argument is applicable, with the additional difficulty that besides some particular objects known, there must also be an innate acquaintance with some particular words in which the knowledge is declared; in short, he

\* *Nouveaux Essais*, liv. i. He also speaks of general propositions being graven on the understanding—which identifies them with innate principles beyond all question.

must maintain that words are born with us as well as knowledge.

It is true that in several passages he seems to qualify his doctrine, — I had almost said to nullify it, — but he does not really give it up.

Thus he tells us in one place that ideas and verities are innate "*as inclinations, dispositions, and habitudes, not as acts,*" and draws a distinction between actual and virtual knowledge.

After he has pronounced explicitly and without qualification that all Geometry and all Arithmetic are innate, the question is asked by the opposing speaker in the Dialogue, "Can we say, then, that the most difficult and profound of sciences are innate?" and he answers that the actual knowledge of them is not innate but the virtual knowledge is; just as a figure delineated by nature in the veins of marble, is in the marble before they are laid open to view in the working.

In other places he teaches that certain ideas and principles are stamped on the mind originally, although it requires, or may require, subsequent labour to discover them.

Thus, whatever apparent inconsistency marks the passages quoted, he really maintains that knowledge may exist in the mind when nothing is actually known. Misled most probably by a metaphor, he treats the mind as a substance in which ideas and maxims can exist stamped or engraved without the man himself being aware of them. You will not fail to remark, in addition to what I

have already said, that this virtual knowledge, this latent science, is a pure assumption. By the very terms of the hypothesis we cannot be conscious of it, for it is latent; and there is not, nor can there be, the slightest evidence in any way possible or conceivable that it exists. It is perfectly imaginary, It is also perfectly needless. As there is nothing else in the asserted knowledge, when, according to the theory, it ceases to be latent, than what can be traced as an acquisition through the organs of sense, to suppose it first to exist in a latent state and afterwards to be *also* acquired from without, is inventing a machinery altogether superfluous.

Yet this is what Leibnitz literally supposes, for Philalethes, the representative of Locke in the Dialogue, having with great good sense asked "whether the prompt acquiescence of the mind in certain truths may not come barely from considering the nature of things which does not allow it to judge otherwise rather than from these propositions being naturally engraven on the understanding," Theophilus (Leibnitz himself) answers, "Both are true: the nature of things and the nature of the mind concur therein:" *i. e.* the propositions are first engraved on the understanding\* without any

\* As propositions cannot be formed except in some particular language—Greek or Latin, or English, or German,—it becomes a curious problem on Leibnitz's hypothesis, whether nature always contrives to engrave them on the understanding in the language of the country in which a man happens to be born.

consciousness of their existence, and then the nature of things operates upon it so as to make corresponding impressions which bring the original ones into cognizance — a gratuitous and not even plausible hypothesis.

The doctrine of a twofold origin as here set forth seems to be a part of his strange theory of a pre-established harmony, or at least chimes in with it: the ideas and maxims are in the mind, while objects and events totally unconnected with them but completely correspondent are existing and happening outside. Nothing can be more totally destitute of evidence. It is a pure fiction.

The first part of these remarks will apply with little or no modification to Kant's *cognitions a priori*.

By cognitions rigorously interpreted he must mean either knowledge itself or the propositions in which such knowledge is affirmed, and in either case the objections urged against Leibnitz are valid against him. There is, indeed, another interpretation—a third meaning—brought forward in defence or explanation of the cognitions in question; an interpretation which would resolve Kant's doctrine into a mere assertion of certain modes of procedure which are natural to the mind, and are called forth by the exercise of the senses on appropriate occasions, at various periods in after life.

The discrimination of modes of mental action from general propositions, which I insisted upon in

the preceding letter, will enable me to show, when the occasion arrives, in what sense the plea is urged and how far it is available.

I have in the preceding argument treated these innate principles and *à priori* cognitions solely as general propositions, without regard to the character of the facts comprised in them, and have endeavoured to show that, from their very nature as such, they must be posterior to a knowledge of the individual facts which they comprehend; that, without such knowledge, no principles, maxims, or cognitions of any kind can exist.

But it is not all general propositions which, in the theories before us, are maintained to be innate principles or *à priori* cognitions. It is only those which are characterised by necessity and universality: attributes (it is alleged) not to be discovered by experience or perception but furnished by the mind itself.

The examination of the doctrine here intimated will occupy the two next letters, after which I shall enter upon the consideration of cognitions in their second character, in which, emerging from the condition of maxims or general propositions, they claim to be regarded as modes of mental procedure.

## LETTER VIII.

GENERAL PROPOSITIONS (IN CONTINUATION.)—PROPOSITIONS EXPRESSIVE OF NECESSARY FACTS.—THE *A PRIORI* COGNITIONS OF KANT.

IN taking up the subject mentioned at the close of my last letter, I must draw your attention to the circumstance that in the passages quoted from Leibnitz and Kant there are two assertions made respecting innate principles and cognitions *à priori*: first, that they are independent of experience and even of all impressions on the senses; secondly, that they owe the necessity and universality which distinguish them from other propositions to the mind itself. More extraordinary assertions never saw the light.

A sort of haze seems to envelope some of the terms here employed, particularly the words experience and necessity. To the latter, I shall come by-and-by: at present I have to do with the former.

Experience is evidently of various kinds, sometimes it is simple and sometimes complex. When it is simple and has reference to external objects, it is the same thing as perception through the organs of sense. Perception is, indeed, a more

comprehensive word, for it may be used of only a single quality, whereas "experience," in common usage and in the simplest cases, denotes the perception of two or more qualities in connexion with each other, or what is appropriately termed a fact, of which a proposition is the verbal expression. We cannot, in ordinary language, be said to know the colour red by experience. We know it from perceiving or having perceived it, but we might, with great propriety, be said to know by experience that blood is of that colour. So, in common parlance, we learn by experience that ice is cold, that steel is hard, that metals are expanded by heat; or we may resort to the wider term and say we perceive them to be so.

I have introduced these remarks for the purpose of showing that the question "whether an external fact is learned from experience," is virtually identical with the question "whether it is learned from perception."

Kant himself seems to admit the same thing and to draw a similar distinction between the two phrases, when he says, in a passage already quoted, that cognitions *à priori* are independent of experience and *even* of all impressions on the senses.

Bearing in mind these considerations let us examine how far innate principles and *à priori* cognitions can be properly characterised as being thus independent. Since however a separate examination of the instances given or referred to, both by

Leibnitz and by Kant, would only weary you by a double commentary, I will direct my remarks chiefly to the latter author, with the bare intimation that they will in substance apply to his great predecessor.

For the purpose in view I will take the proposition that two straight lines cannot inclose a space\*, which, according to Kant's assertion, must be an *à priori* cognition or judgment; and as such must be independent of experience or even of any impression on the senses.

But here I stumble, as I have no doubt you will do, at the very threshold; for it is plain that in order to form such a judgment you must have learned through your organs of sense what a straight line is, what the act of inclosing is, and what a space is. You must also have before you two definite straight lines, either parallel to each other or inclining to each other; and in either case you inevitably perceive that they do not inclose a space, just as clearly as you perceive that they are straight lines, not crooked or curved, and that they are black or coloured.

\* This proposition has been discussed in reference to the same part of philosophy by Dr. Whewell, Mr. John Mill, Sir John Herschell, and other writers; and on finding myself going over the same ground, I had thoughts of substituting some other proposition; but as what appears in the text was written without advertence to their dissertations, and my treatment of the question differs in several respects from that of any of my predecessors, I think it the best way to let the passage stand as originally penned.



Up to this point there is confessedly nothing but perception. Whatever you know so far, you perceive or have perceived through your organs of sense.

But the *à priori* judgment (we are told) is not merely that the lines *do not* but that they *cannot* inclose a space.

Well, let us see what truly happens before any one discerns this inability, and whether even in this respect the cognition is independent of experience.

Perceiving as the lines lie before you, that they do not inclose a space in their actual position, you place them, or you conceive them to be placed, in another position. They were, we will assume, originally parallel and half an inch asunder; but you proceed to make them approach as near to each other as possible, while you still keep them parallel, and you find that no inclosing takes place by approximation; or in other words, supposing the lines for the purpose of convenient elucidation to be of equal length, you can form with them only two sides of a parallelogram, the two other sides remaining open or rather being deficient. A space is not circumscribed; the problem is not solved. You next try whether the feat can be achieved by inclining the lines towards each other, and you find that in every position in which you can place them or conceive them to be placed, while a mutual inclination is preserved, they cannot converge towards

or touch each other at one end without diverging at the other ; so that the inclosing of a space cannot possibly ensue. To effect this one of the lines at least must be bent, which would be in direct contradiction to the datum.

Hence it is plain that the formation of such a judgment, as it is termed, requires perceiving certain objects and either actually trying or conceiving certain transpositions ; and after these things have been done, which may take place with wonderful rapidity, we discern that in this particular instance the two straight lines not only do not but cannot inclose a space. We may further discern, on reflection, that what holds good of the particular lines before us holds good of every pair of such lines which we can either draw or imagine, and that to assert the contrary in any case involves a direct contradiction in thought and language.

I have purposely used the phrase "we may discern," because it frequently happens that the learner perceives a particular truth without proceeding to generalize it, or to discern the necessity or impossibility, as the case may be, in all similar instances.\*

Mr. Stewart, who doubtless speaks from his expe-

\* This is taught, indeed, by Leibnitz himself, who while contending for the maxims being engraven on the mind, admits that they are sometimes deciphered with labour and frequently not at all.

rience as a teacher of mathematics, has a passage which is an apt illustration of this point:—

“It will not, I apprehend, be denied,” he says, “that when a learner first enters on the study of geometry, he considers the diagrams before him as individual objects, and as individual objects alone. In reading, for example, the demonstration just referred to, of the equality of the three angles of every triangle to two right angles, he thinks only of the triangle which is presented to him on the margin of the page. Nay, so completely does this particular figure engross his attention, that it is not without some difficulty he, in the first instance, transfers the demonstration to another triangle whose form is very different, or even to the same triangle placed in an inverted position. It is in order to correct this natural bias of the mind, that a judicious teacher, after satisfying himself that the student comprehends perfectly the force of the demonstration, as applicable to the particular triangle which Euclid has selected, is led to vary the diagram in different ways, with a view to show him, that the very same demonstration, expressed in the very same form of words, is equally applicable to them all: in this manner he comes, by slow degrees, to comprehend the nature of general reasoning, establishing insensibly in his mind this fundamental logical principle, that when the enunciation of a mathematical proposition involves only a certain portion of the attributes of the diagram

which is employed to illustrate it, the same proposition must hold true of any other diagram involving the same attributes, how much soever distinguished from it by other specific peculiarities." \*

To revert to the case which led to this quotation. Here then we have, 1. perception of external objects ; 2. trial either actual or conceptual following the perception ; 3. discernment of necessary facts as necessary, following the trial ; 4. generalization following the discernment of the particular necessary facts : all which incidents involve nothing but the ordinary operations of the mind as described in the preceding letters, and indeed in almost any psychological treatise you may happen to take up.

No one can discern that a proposition is what is called a necessary and universal truth, without going through such a process as I have described.

Hence it is a strange perversion of language to affirm mathematical propositions to be independent of experience or even any impression on the senses, when without such experience or impressions we could not possibly arrive at them : when even by the admission of both the philosophers under review, the exercise of the senses or perception or experience is the indispensable preliminary to bringing the propositions into discernible existence. With what semblance of propriety then can they be

\* Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, vol. ii. p. 117.

said to be independent of that without which they must confessedly remain dead, and would be really impossible ?

But putting aside the consideration of such misleading language, I would more particularly insist upon the needlessness of resorting to the supposition of any innate principles or cognitions *à priori* to account for the peculiar character of mathematical science, or the necessity and universality of its propositions. The hypothesis is not only gratuitous, not only without evidence, and more especially without any support in our consciousness, but entirely superfluous ; which I think may be very briefly shown.

Through the whole process of mathematical reasoning we are engaged in the operation of discerning, and in the mere act of discernment it is of course implied that we discern what is, and not something contradictory to it ; just as when we feel love to any one it is implied that we do not feel hate. An object cannot be itself and some other thing. Lines cannot at one and the same time be parallel and meet, which is only another mode of saying they cannot be at once parallel and unparallel ; and we are of course incapable of discerning what they are incapable of being. We can discern them only as they are.

To be perceptible at all objects must possess some qualities, and certain of these qualities must, in the nature of the case, be perceptibly necessary : *i.e.* necessary to each other, or, in different language,

some of them cannot exist without others, and we cannot perceive the first without perceiving the second, nor without perceiving that they are mutually necessary.

Of the links in a chain freely depending from a hook in the wall, some are necessarily nearer the ground than others are. We perceive the fact without reflection, and if we come to think about it, we discern that it cannot be otherwise, and that the same fact must have place not only in the particular chain before us but (to carry the generalization no further) in all chains under the same circumstances: to suppose the contrary would be to suppose a contradiction.

Of all this, however, the explanation is simple enough without calling in the aid of cognitions *à priori* or supposing the impossible process of the mind bestowing necessity on the facts before it. To adopt for the occasion objectionable and really unmeaning phraseology, it is not we that furnish or apply any principle or cognition, or that give the character to the facts: it is the facts themselves that have this character and we discern it.

If certain attributes, or facts appropriately termed coexisting conditions, were not in themselves necessary, they could not be discerned to be so by an intelligent observer.

All external facts are doubtless necessary from the very constitution of matter, but to us, for want of insight or evidence, many of them are contingent.

Whether, nevertheless, all facts can be said to be necessary or not, it is certain that we discern the attribute in only a portion of them ; not because our minds invest some facts with the attribute and not others, as taught by the German metaphysicians, which is a purely imaginary transaction, expressed in language without definite meaning, but for the simple reason already given. We discern them to be necessary because they are so, as we perceive St. Paul's church in London to be lofty because it is lofty.

In certain cases, I repeat, one fact or state of things cannot possibly exist without another fact or state of things ; and the whole mystery is, that we see their mutual dependence, we discern them to be inseparable facts, and cannot even imagine one without the other. We bring nothing to the facts but the discernment of what they are.

Hence Kant's doctrine about cognitions *à priori*, as far as mathematical propositions and other self-evident or demonstrable assertions are concerned, amounts, when divested of error or (perhaps it would be more correct to say) *points*, to the simple truth, that we are so constituted as to discern, or be capable of discerning, necessary facts as such when they are presented to us. In this there is surely nothing more marvellous than our perceiving objects to possess other characteristics ; to be red or yellow, to be high or low, rough or smooth, equal or unequal, to resemble or to differ.

A good deal of confusion has arisen on this subject from not properly limiting to one acceptation, or rather one allocation, the term *necessary*, which denotes, correctly speaking, an attribute of facts, not an attribute of our knowledge, nor yet of the propositions we form respecting those facts, and expressive of our knowledge. This distinction is so important, and yet, as far as I know, has been so entirely overlooked, that you must excuse me for dwelling upon it at some length. The whole question may indeed be decided on this single ground.

When two facts cannot have place or exist independently of each other; when to exist at all they must *coexist*, they are properly said to be necessary, *i. e.* necessary to each other's existence. But if we say that our discernment of this mutual dependence is necessary, or that a proposition expressing the mutual dependence is a necessary truth, we transfer the term according to a common artifice of speech to a position in which it is not strictly at home, and cannot be employed except elliptically. To show clearly what the phrase signifies, we must retransfer it to its proper allocation, and supply the needful ellipses.

All that the epithet necessary can mean when we say that a certain proposition is a necessary truth is, that the proposition affirms a *necessary fact*, or, it may be, necessary facts. It is the facts



which are necessary, not the knowledge of them, nor yet the assertion of their existence.

When Kant, therefore, affirms necessity to be a sure characteristic of a cognition *à priori*, he transfers an attribute of the facts which (to borrow his own language) are cognized to the cognition, or mental state, or expression of that state, to which it is not really applicable.

From thus attributing necessity to the cognitions (mental states), he is led into the error of regarding it as being furnished or infused into the facts by the mind (an inconceivable process), instead of being only discerned by it as a characteristic of the facts themselves.

If facts alone are regarded and spoken of as necessary, which is the only mode of philosophically treating the subject, the whole difficulty conjured up by our philosophers vanishes. There is no longer any question about the source or origin of what Kant terms necessary cognitions: it immediately becomes obvious that certain facts are discerned by us to be necessary, as certain lines to be straight, or certain angles to be acute, simply because they are so; and then, as a matter of course in the case of intelligent beings gifted with speech, the discernment is enunciated in propositions. It would really be quite as correct (custom apart) to call our knowledge of angles, acute or obtuse, as to call our knowledge of self-evident or demonstrable facts, necessary.

This transference of terms from their proper location (it might be named translocation) is a common incident in language, arising perhaps partly from the poverty which characterizes expression in comparison with the multifariousness of objects and the consequent affluence of thought; partly from our proneness to abbreviation or compendious utterance; and it is not to be altogether avoided or condemned: but when we are compelled, or find it convenient, to resort to it; when we make one word serve several purposes, or take it out of its proper connexion for the sake of brevity, we should at least know what we are about, and be especially careful not to treat the "translocated" term as if it retained precisely the same applicability in its new position.

For example, we call a court of law which tries offences against person or property, a criminal court; but we should (it is to be hoped), in this country at least, egregiously err were we to regard the epithet as denoting the moral quality of the judicial proceedings there in the same way as when we apply it to the offences brought to trial. We must retransfer it to its proper position to express fully what, in its transplanted state, it so very elliptically indicates. Instead of speaking of a criminal court, we shall then style it a court for the trial of criminal acts. So we sometimes transfer the term *natural* from the objects of knowledge to the knowledge itself, and speak of "natural

science" — not intending by the epithet to qualify the substantive to which it is prefixed, or to apply it in the same sense as when we say that the emotions of hope and joy and fear and grief are natural, but to mark the character of the objects of which the science treats. It is a convenient form of compendious expression, and does not entail much risk of our inferring that the knowledge, in virtue of its being natural, will, like hope and joy, spring up spontaneously in the mind, and needs not to be sought after by assiduous study.

Yet it is really an inference of a similar kind which Kant has fallen into. Having transferred the term necessary from the facts to the cognition of the facts, he has drawn his conclusions without adverting to the elliptical character of the epithet in its new position and the different offices it is meant to serve in the two cases. He has overlooked the consideration that our knowledge of a necessary fact is itself neither more nor less necessary than our knowledge of any other kind of fact.

If on a sheet of paper, at which we are looking, two right lines drawn with black ink not yet dry (I purposely introduce these trivial circumstances) intersect each other, we cannot help seeing the lines and their intersection and also that they are black and wet; nor can we help (at least when it is pointed out to us) observing that they make four angles, or discerning, if we happen to be mathematicians, that

the four angles are together equal to four right angles.

In this case, if our knowledge of the facts, some of which are called contingent and some necessary, may be said to be itself necessary, it is in the sense of unavoidable: the exhibition of the sheet of paper to our sight obliges us, if we look at all, to see what it contains; but this unavoidableness is quite independent of the differences in character of the several facts discerned. We cannot avoid seeing the contingent facts that the lines are black and wet any more than the necessary facts that their intersection makes four angles and that these four angles are together equal to four right angles. In both cases we perceive the facts as they exist *because* they so exist.

Should our vocabulary be so scanty or our dislike of circumlocution so great, that we are obliged or choose to resort to the expedient of designating our knowledge as necessary because the facts known are so, the least we can do is not to draw our conclusions as if the epithet in both cases equally and similarly qualified the substantive to which it is attached.

## LETTER IX.

GENERAL PROPOSITIONS (IN CONTINUATION). CONTINGENT PROPOSITIONS AND LAWS OF NATURE. THE *À PRIORI* COGNITIONS OF KANT FURTHER CONSIDERED.

PERHAPS you will think, and not without reason, that I have bestowed sufficient attention on cognitions *à priori*, but there is another class of them which must not be entirely passed over.

The so-called cognitions considered in my last letter are what are usually termed necessary truths—propositions, namely, the contraries of which involve a contradiction and which are said to be necessary because the facts affirmed by them are so.

But the propositions which I have now in view have not this character, inasmuch as the contraries of them may be imagined without any contradiction being implied. Such are propositions relating to the events around us, to the operation of various substances on each other, to the succession of natural phenomena, to the causes of effects, and to the effects of causes.

Amongst these there are some of extreme generality which have been considered by certain philo-

sophers as necessary or as expressing necessary truths in the same way as mathematical axioms.

Of this kind are the following : "every change has a cause ;" "similar causes have similar effects ;" "similar effects have similar causes."

Applying to these his test of universality and necessity, Kant pronounces them (with a modification regarding the first) to be cognitions *à priori* independent of experience. They are, he says, necessary, and they admit of no exceptions.

There is, nevertheless, a wide and fundamental distinction between the facts expressed by this class of propositions and the facts expressed by mathematical propositions. While, as I have just had occasion to remark, the facts affirmed by the latter are discerned to be necessary, those affirmed by the former are not discerned to be so. While there would be self-contradiction in asserting that some parallel lines meet, there would be no self-contradiction in the assertion that some changes occur spontaneously without causes ; or that similar causes do not always produce similar effects, although there might be and indeed would be an utter inconsistency between such assertions and others which we are habitually and unavoidably making.

Self-contradiction in a proposition is one thing, and the inconsistency of a proposition held by any one with other propositions maintained by the same person, is another.

By those who admit that mathematical proposi-

tions are not independent of perception or experience, this other class cannot obviously be considered as being so. Much of the reasoning, indeed, in my last letter, will, *mutatis mutandis*, apply to both classes, and hence the necessity of any long explanation is superseded: but still, as there is a real and important difference between them, let us briefly consider the first of these maxims: "every change has a cause."

It is obvious that no one could know what a change is\* and what a cause is, except by perceiving some particular cause and some particular change following it, such as the application of fire to wood and the consequent charring of the material. Having witnessed a number of similarly consecutive circumstances—a variety of particular events followed by other events—we designate the first events in the sequence by the common name "cause," and the second by that of "effect," or, as here, "change:" and from these observations, following our natural propensity to generalise, we draw the universal conclusion—"every change has a cause."

We manifestly could not have drawn it had we seen changes happening without causes.

There is no difference between the origin of these comprehensive propositions and that of such minor generalisations as "metals are expanded by heat;"

\* Kant acknowledges this in the case of "change;" it is curious how he failed to discern that "cause" is exactly in the same predicament.

“water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen;” “men are subject to hunger and thirst;” “the angle of incidence in the case of rays of light is equal to the angle of reflection:”—propositions which no one, I presume, maintains to be cognitions *à priori*, but which are truly conclusions from observation or experience.

The maxim that every change has a cause, is in the same way a generalisation of observed facts; only it is a proposition of far greater generality: it is what is called a law of nature deduced from observation, just as is the less general law that metals are expanded by heat.

In a treatise which I published several years ago\*, I explained at some length, that all such laws are conclusions from collective facts, but more comprehensive than the aggregate of facts from which they are drawn; and are precisely of the same nature, and rest on the same evidence, as particular inferences.

From the collective fact that, as far as observation has extended, all metals have been found to expand when additional heat has been applied to them, we deduce the universal law expressed in the formula “all metals are expanded by heat,” which is an affirmation independent of time, and implies that they have always expanded when not observed, and that they will expand in future as they have done in time past.

\* The Theory of Reasoning.



It is precisely on the same grounds or from the same premises that I make the particular inference, that the mercury in the thermometer on the mantel-shelf of the library in which I am writing, will rise if it be removed to the neighbouring conservatory.

Such is the very nature of contingent reasoning: it consists in thus inferring unobserved facts from similar facts observed, and the inference is equally valid whether it is restricted to a particular event or extends to all events of a similar character.

Hence the general proposition "every change has a cause," termed by Kant a cognition *à priori*, is in reality a conclusion deduced from observed facts, precisely as all conclusions are deduced in moral, probable, or contingent reasoning.

As far as human observation has extended all changes have had causes; this is the sum of our actual knowledge; and hence we infer that all changes past, present, or future, have had or will have causes, although beyond the reach of observation: a conclusion which we more simply and concisely express without reference to time, by the maxim in question — "every change has a cause."

In all these conclusions of probable or contingent reasoning, whether they are general laws or inferences of particular facts, you will not fail to observe, from what I have said, that there is one uniform and essential characteristic.

Although they are all drawn from an unavoidably limited experience, which may be embodied

in a proposition affirming what I have called the collective fact, they are obviously much more comprehensive than the collective fact: they go beyond the experience of which it is the summary.

It is, indeed, in this going beyond experience that such reasoning wholly consists.

If we had had experience, or possessed personal knowledge of the individual facts comprised in our conclusions, we should have had no occasion to infer them; or, more correctly speaking, the inferring of them could not have taken place: and on the other hand, if we had had no experience or possessed no knowledge of similar facts, we could not have inferred any facts at all.

In the one case inferring would have been superseded by knowing, in the other case precluded by ignorance.

It may have been from seeing our conclusions in this way transcend actual knowledge that Kant was led to imagine the most general of them to be cognitions *à priori*, or independent of, if not antecedent to, experience, overlooking the important truth, that although it is the essence of such conclusions to comprise facts not themselves individually observed, yet they could not be deduced except from similar facts which had already fallen under observation.

And if on the ground of going beyond experience general laws are to be termed cognitions *à priori*, every conclusion we draw in contingent reasoning,

although restricted to a single event, would be entitled to the same appellation. The inference that my thermometer would rise on being removed to a warmer room, might claim to be styled an *à priori* cognition.

It will scarcely, after the foregoing explanation, be contended that general laws, to the formation of which a knowledge of facts is thus indispensable, are independent of it, because they comprise something beyond the individual facts known. It might as well be alleged that our seeing the prospect from the top of a mountain is independent of our having reached the summit.

The sum of the preceding considerations may be briefly stated.

As Kant's mathematical cognitions *à priori* proved, on the examination to which they were subjected in my last letter, to be only general propositions affirming necessary co-existing facts or conditions, which we discern to be necessary because they are so in their very nature ; so these other cognitions turn out, on a similar scrutiny, to be nothing else than conclusions in contingent reasoning deduced from the facts of observation or experience.

We are undoubtedly so constituted as to reason in this way, but we cannot make a single inference without previous knowledge.

## LETTER X.

GENERAL PROPOSITIONS (IN CONTINUATION). KANT'S  
DOCTRINE OF *À PRIORI* COGNITIONS AS SET FORTH  
BY ONE OF HIS EXPOSITORS.

You will doubtless feel that these discussions on an abstruse question in which none but thorough metaphysicians can take any interest, grow a little wearisome, and therefore, in commencing another letter in reference to the same topic, I will promise that it shall be brief.

It will be very probably maintained by some of the partisans of German Philosophy that all which was meant by Leibnitz and Kant in asserting their innate principles and cognitions *à priori* is, that we are naturally so constituted as to form them when appropriate occasions arise. If this were the case, they certainly would have been wasting a vast deal of superfluous ingenuity in proving what no one would be found to contest. In regard to Leibnitz such a defence is wholly irrelevant, as he draws a distinction between actually possessing truths graven on the mind, and having only the faculty of acquiring them. As to Kant, something of this kind, if I mistake not, is alleged, or seems to be

alleged, in his behalf by Chalybäus in the "Historical Development of Speculative Philosophy," published a few years ago, although the precise sense in which it is to be understood strikes me as not altogether clear.

After stating that Kant conceived he had discovered that the most general and highest notions are *à priori* contained in our faculty of cognition, Chalybäus proceeds as follows :

" But these the most general notions of relationship, such as cause and effect, substance and accident, &c. &c., must not be conceived as being ready made, and *à priori* placed into man's consciousness previous to all reflection, or in other words, as innate notions and ideas. *The only things innate to our minds are certain modes of procedure in cognising and judging.* If we actually come to know or judge any thing, we necessarily proceed to do it in that peculiar manner ; and hence immediately, and, as it were, without any choice of our own, we view the things as standing related to each other ; for example, as causes and effects, substances and accidents. Now we do this without any premeditation ; and the child, and the unthinking person who has never for a moment reflected upon the abstract notion of these relations, proceeds in the same way as the philosopher. This manner of viewing things is simply the mode and the necessary law of our perception itself. Afterwards only when reflection has been cultivated, and we turn

our attention to the forms of our activity, we become conscious of it *in abstracto*, and then we designate it in language by substantives (appellatives). Our understanding itself is also capable of making these modes—the laws which regulate its own movements—the subject of observation, and of reducing them to certain abstract notions, which, however, may not be confounded with innate cognitions or ideas in the sense attached to them by Des Cartes or by Plato, but are themselves really the results (products) of abstraction on the part of our own understanding.”\*

If this passage could be interpreted as simply intending to state that we are so constituted as to perform certain mental operations, in the ordinary acceptance of that term, I should say that, allowance being made for certain exceptionable expressions and a little confusion of things which ought to be kept distinct, it contains a tolerably correct view of the subject, and corresponds, in the main, with that which I have myself given: but it would not, so interpreted, be at all according to Kant. It would amount, in fact, to an abandonment of the peculiarity of his doctrines, the essence of which consists in representing (doubtless with much confusion and inconsistency) what are only the modes and results of mental action, as knowledge or cogni-

\* Historical Development of Speculative Philosophy from Kant to Hegel by H. M. Chalybüus, Edersheim's translation, p. 46.

tions indigenous to the mind, or springing up in the mind independent of experience or of all impressions on the senses. The very passage which I first cited from Chalybäus represents Kant as conceiving he had discovered that the most general and highest *notions* are *à priori* contained in our faculty of cognition, which, inasmuch as the term notion implies the act of knowing, is clearly asserting knowledge somehow to exist when nothing is known, and which is therefore a doctrine totally inconsistent with the supposed interpretation as well as with itself.

General notions contained *à priori* in a faculty of cognition on the one hand and modes of mental procedure on the other, are wholly different things, as I have pretty fully explained in a former letter; and the attempt to identify them can lead to nothing but confusion.\* On carefully sifting the expres-

\* Locke very forcibly shows the futility of such an identification in the chapter of his essay before referred to:—

Having affirmed the truth that “no proposition can be said to be in the mind which it never yet knew, which it was never yet conscious of,” he proceeds: “For if any one [proposition] may, then, by the same reason, all propositions that are true and the mind is capable of ever assenting to, may be said to be in the mind, and to be imprinted: since if any one can be said to be in the mind, which it never yet knew; it must be only because it is capable of knowing it, and so the mind is of all the truths it ever shall know. Nay, thus truths may be imprinted on the mind, which it never did nor ever shall know<sup>1</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> This was actually (marvellous as it may seem) the doctrine of Leibnitz, even after he had read this passage in Locke.

sions, however, we shall find that something more is meant by "certain modes of procedure in cognising and judging being innate to our minds" than the plain truth that we are so constituted mentally as to discern and compare and generalise the facts presented to us. It is meant to assert that the mind contains innately certain forms with which it invests or according to which it regards external facts. In consequence of this constitution of our minds we cannot do otherwise than view things as having certain relations, and divers truths as possessing necessity and universality, not because these relations and attributes really exist in the things, but because we cast them over what we perceive. We, in fact, according to the doctrine under consideration, furnish forth the relations (such as that between cause and effect) and the necessity and universality of certain truths (*e.g.* mathematical propositions) from our own inward

for a man may live long, and die at last in ignorance of many truths, which his mind was capable of knowing, and that with certainty. *So that if the capacity of knowing be the natural impression contended for, all the truths a man ever comes to know, will, by this account, be every one of them innate; and this great point will amount to no more, but only to a very improper way of speaking; which while it pretends to assert the contrary, says nothing different from those who deny innate principles. For nobody, I think, ever denied that the mind was capable of knowing several truths. The capacity, they say, is innate, the knowledge acquired. But then to what end such contest for certain innate maxims?*"—*Essay on Human Understanding*, book i. chap. ii. sect. 5.



resources ; we impose them on the external world, and do not, as intelligent or percipient beings, discern things to be causes and effects, and facts to be necessary, merely because they are so in nature.

It is difficult to describe wholly groundless theories, some parts of which are generally inconsistent with others, in unexceptionable or uniformly applicable language ; but I think I could make good my description, were it needful, by abundant quotations.

Such a view of the matter as that given by Chalybäus is perfectly compatible with Kant's doctrine examined in a preceding letter, and regarded by him with much gratuitous self-complacency in the light of a happy discovery of his own ; the doctrine, namely, of the mind's acting on the external world ; or rather, it may be considered as part of that doctrine ; but it is both self-inconsistent and irreconcilable with many other passages of his philosophy. After what I have already said, in several places, it is scarcely needful to repeat that the whole theory of the mind's action on objects and imposing its own forms upon them, is the pure product of the imagination. It is entirely destitute of evidence to support it if not of precise meaning. To adopt for the occasion the language of the system, the only thing the mind supplies or furnishes, in its perception of an external world, is the discernment which it exercises.

In conclusion, it may be useful to describe briefly, the distinctive peculiarities of four separate theories

on the subject before us, which it has fallen in my way to notice in the preceding discussions. They severally teach as follows :

1. That there are innate ideas and principles stamped on the mind, but existing in a latent state until they are roused, or brought into distinct cognisance, by the exercise of the senses ; amongst which principles are all necessary truths. This is Leibnitz's doctrine.

2. That there are certain cognitions which are *à priori* without being innate, and, although independent of the senses, are awakened in the mind when, and not before, the senses are exercised ; and which include all mathematical judgments and all other propositions marked by necessity and universality. This is the doctrine of Kant, according at least to one interpretation, or in one of its phases.

3. That there are certain modes of mental procedure innate to the mind, by which it necessarily views things under certain forms and relations, not because the things are so fashioned or related, but because the constitution of the mind determines it to impose these forms and relations on the outer world. This is the doctrine ascribed to Kant by Chalybäus. It may be considered as another phase of his philosophy, and is supported by numerous passages : but how far it is reconcilable with the preceding theory (No. 2) may be left to his disciples to determine.

4. That we human beings have no innate knowledge, but are so constituted as to perceive objects as having various properties, because they actually possess such properties ; to be high and low, near and distant, straight and crooked, like and unlike, connected together as necessarily coexisting, and unconnected or casually conjoined : that we are likewise so constituted as to indicate by articulate speech what we thus perceive, and in the exercise of this part of our constitution, to express, in general propositions, the points of resemblance which we discern amongst the various objects brought under our cognizance.

This is the doctrine maintained in the present Letters.

## LETTER XI.

THE PROMINENT CHARACTERISTICS OF GERMAN  
PHILOSOPHY AND THEIR CAUSES.

You will, I think, agree with me that the tone of German Philosophy does not, generally speaking, harmonize with the English understanding; and is even decidedly repugnant to it. Largely as the philosophy in question appears to have engaged the attention of our continental neighbours, and chimed in with their strain of thought, it has found few cordial followers here, and it is worth while to search for the sources of this dissonance and antipathy.

The principal causes of the mysticism, obscurity, vagueness, and, I may add, extravagance, which in the estimation of most Englishmen, and I must frankly declare in my own, characterise the speculations of German philosophers, and repel many of us from the study of their works, appear to me to be the following:

1. Regarding perception through the organs of sense as something to be analysed, explained, or accounted for, instead of considering it as a simple and primary fact of consciousness, the only possible

explanation relating to it being an explanation of the physical conditions on which it depends.

2. Personifying what are usually termed the faculties of the mind and even what may be called 'mental incidents,' and treating them as distinct entities.

3. Treating in a similar way the abstractions, generalisations, and other expedients of language relating to the objects and events of the material world.

4. Adducing imaginary or fictitious events as facts, sometimes in explanation of realities and sometimes in explanation of other fictions: a practice which is an inevitable consequence of the before-mentioned errors, although frequently the result of different circumstances; and especially of the unbridled spirit of hypothesis.

It is not too much to affirm that these fictitious facts, however they may originate, constitute the great body of the philosophy of such writers as Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

Such defects as are enumerated in these four divisions may, it is true, be found in English writers, but they appear to me to exist amongst German philosophers in so greatly exaggerated a form, that the characteristic style of speculative thought in the two nations is widely contrasted.

Our own philosophers have been, in the main, disposed to conform their researches to the methods employed in physical inquiry; and although their

scientific success has not been great, owing to the many traditional prejudices under which they have entered upon the subject, and also to their not perhaps seeing clearly how to follow the line of inductive investigation pointed out to them by physical science, they have usually felt both the desire and the necessity of speaking plainly to the practical understandings of their audience. Hence they have given us much good sense, if not much precise thinking, and at the same time comparatively little mysticism.

With the continental philosophers, the case has been very different, as I shall now proceed to show.

1. The first error above particularized, namely, not accepting the perception of external objects as a primary fact of consciousness, which does not require or admit of proof, explanation, or question, is widely prevalent, and manifests itself in the denial either of the existence of the outward world, or of our direct knowledge of its existence.

I have already considered these views as expounded by some English philosophers, and also by Kant, which renders it needless to enter upon them now at any length. Much of what I have said in reference to the speculations of Berkeley and others, will apply to almost every modification of the ideal theory.

The form which the theory assumes amongst some other German philosophers may be thus stated:

We know only our subjective states, or in other

words our states of consciousness: we can know nothing of the causes of these states, nothing beyond them. That external things exist, is only a supposition or an inference, which is forced upon us, or which we resort to for the satisfaction of our craving for explanation, but which is, at best, only a conclusion from internal or subjective phenomena. Thus Fichte contends that we first have representations or images in our minds, and then suppose or infer external objects in order to account for them.

I have first to observe as to the assertion that we know only our subjective states — an assertion continually repeated by German and even English philosophers — how obviously it assumes the whole question, and how utterly at variance it is with our consciousness. We are conscious, as I have before had frequent occasion to remark, and reiterate now merely because the train of refutation requires it, that we know external objects. This is exemplified in the trite instance of seeing a tree, which, according to the philosophy under review, is only a subjective fact; but which is truly both subjective and objective. No one can possibly be in the subjective state called seeing a tree (which is knowing through the organ of sight), without being at once conscious of himself as seeing, and conscious also (as an integrant part of the act) of seeing the object. Seeing can no more take place or exist without both a

seer and an object seen, than a triangle can exist without both three sides and three angles.

But the most important consideration remains. The very phrase "it is *only a subjective fact*," presupposes a knowledge of that which it denies—a knowledge of what is *objective*. If we knew no other than subjective facts, we could not think or speak of objective ones, in comparison or contrast with them. The phrase would then have no meaning for us, and indeed could not possibly have been invented or employed. I have before made this remark on another occasion, and in different language, but you will pardon me for repeating a truth which is so little recognized or understood and so essential to a right apprehension of the question.

But you proceed to urge with Fichte\* (allow me to constitute you his advocate) that we infer or suppose that there is an external object—a tree. This is the same great fallacy in another form, and deserves especial consideration: we do *not* infer the existence of the external object: no inference takes place, nor could it take place; for we can infer or suppose only such facts as we already *generically* know. We can infer only internal facts similar to those we have been conscious of, and only external facts similar to those we have known through the

\* In his "Destination of Man" he tells us that nothing more is known of a cause for our sensations than this—that such an inference is unavoidable.



organs of sense.\* This is the fundamental law of moral, probable, or contingent reasoning. If then you infer that the tree is an object *out of you*, or different from yourself, you must already know what objects *out of you* are: *i. e.* you must possess a knowledge of the class of facts, alleged to be only inferred, before you infer the particular fact, and in order to be able to infer it.

It is consequently impossible that the existence of an external world can be deduced by reasoning: it is directly perceived: it is not, nor can it be, a matter of inference; it is a matter of perception or knowledge.

This erroneous doctrine sometimes, it will be observed, assumes the shape of denying not only a knowledge of matter, or of the external world, but its very existence.

In this, however, there is the same contradiction, only a little modified in form, that I have just pointed out, as I explained in a former letter. You cannot rationally deny the existence either of any thing known, or of anything absolutely unknown.

Now it is clear that in denying the existence of matter, you transgress in one of these ways; for you must either know what matter is, or not know it.

\* What is here said contains a most important and universal truth, prolific of consequences, and not to be lightly passed over by any one who wishes to master the subject. Let him try to follow it out, in some of its most obvious applications, and he will become sensible of its value.

If you say you know what it is, you assert a knowledge of that which, according to you, has no existence, and never has had existence : you affirm that you know a nonentity : your doctrine is therefore self-contradictory.

If, on the other hand, in denying the existence of matter, you say that you have no knowledge of matter, you may escape self-contradiction, but it is at the expense of falling into an absolute nullity : you assert the nonexistence of something perfectly unknown to you, of which, consequently, you can form no conception, and concerning which you can draw no inference, nor make any rational assertion ; your doctrine is therefore altogether destitute of meaning, perfectly null, worse than idle ; as much so, as if you were to affirm the nonexistence of an unknown quantity of an unknown substance in an unknown place at an unknown time.

A similar refutation is applicable to the doctrine that we cannot "know things in themselves ;" which involves the same fallacies as those which I have just exposed ; and hence it would be tedious to treat it separately here except in the briefest manner, even if I had not already expressly adverted upon it in one of the letters of the first series devoted to Kant.

The argument, nevertheless, since it has been controverted, and I think misunderstood, may as well be repeated in a condensed form.

You who assert that mankind cannot "know

things in themselves," either understand what "things in themselves" are or you do not. If you say you do, then unless you possess exclusive sources of information, or a monopoly of this peculiar sort of knowledge (which you will not pretend), mankind *have* according to your own declaration a knowledge of things in themselves.

If, on the contrary, you do not know what things in themselves are, your doctrine amounts to a perfectly unmeaning assertion: you affirm, in reality, that mankind do not know something you cannot tell what.

There is, in fine, as every reader must have discerned before this time, one dilemma common to all these phases of negation or of scepticism relating to the direct perception, or to the existence, of external things;—a dilemma which seems to have been strangely overlooked when the several doctrines or hypotheses have been put on their trial: they are all, according as their advocate shall adopt one or other of two assertions, between which he is compelled to make choice, either intrinsically unmeaning or self-contradictory, and they cannot be otherwise.

It is understating the case to say, as is commonly said, that they are without proof; they are in a far worse condition than this: they necessarily either contradict themselves or are altogether destitute of rational import. From this dilemma there is manifestly no escaping. *Utrum horum mavis accipe.*

It is easy to see how doctrines which, in this way, either amount to nothing or contain a self-contradiction, are almost sure, when followed out, to lead their authors into vagueness, perplexity, and confusion, and into abundance of fabulous statements and imaginary facts.

It is the same error of not taking the facts of perception as primary and in their nature unsusceptible of proof, explanation, or analysis, which has led to the doctrine taught by some philosophers that everything which we ascribe to objects and which is supposed to come to us from them, has first (to borrow very curious phraseology \*) been put by us into those objects. It has also led to the less extravagant but kindred and not better-founded doctrine, that *part* of what we perceive is furnished by the mind and part by the objects themselves.†

More groundless, vague, and confused doctrines,

\* To show that I am not here drawing on my own imagination, which might be readily supposed by any reader not acquainted with German speculation, I will produce a voucher. "In short," says Chalybäus, in giving an account of Fichte's philosophy, "everything that we ascribe to objects, and that is supposed to come to us from them, *has first been put by us into these objects* by a conclusion." — *Historical Development of Speculative Philosophy*, p. 185 (Eng. translation).

† The writer quoted in the preceding note tells us that Kant acknowledged that objects somehow affect us, but the result of their affecting us is so intimately and thoroughly *mixed up with the ingredient added by our own understanding*, that our sense-perceptions may now be looked upon as a perfectly subjective product, which no longer corresponds to the object. *Ibid.* p. 83. Abundance of other passages of the same tenor might be cited.

could scarcely be given forth. The events described are wholly fabulous and, in truth, impossible.

It must be borne in mind that by "perceiving" is meant a state of consciousness, and if anything is "furnished" by ourselves in the act of perception, we must be conscious of it, first as being present in the mind, or forming a part of the conscious state, and then as being transferred to the object and becoming perceptible through an organ of sense. The only possible way in which we could become cognizant of such a transaction would be this being conscious of it: but as we are utterly unconscious of anything of the kind, the whole proceeding may be justly set down (by all at least whose experience tallies with mine) as purely imaginary. In the process of perception there are undoubtedly both physical facts and mental facts—two kinds of facts which, although they may be connected as causes and effects, are perfectly distinct from each other as objects of knowledge,—but the doctrine before us seems to imply a sort of mongrel facts, partaking of the character of both, and utterly unknown to precise and accurate observation.

Such doctrines as these appear to arise, in some measure at least, from confounding the part played by our physical organism in the preliminary business necessary to perception with the mental act of perceiving.

It is quite true that perception depends conjointly

upon the external object with the inorganic medium necessary in some cases to the sensuous impression, and upon the organic structure of the percipient being, on which the proximate external substance acts. One is not less essential to the mental result than the other, but neither of them must be confounded with that result itself.

Perhaps a simple case may sufficiently illustrate the part taken by each as well as the fundamental difference of both from the act or state of consciousness which they unite to produce. For this purpose I will adduce an hypothetical instance, not taken from any writer on the subject (probably none would like the credit of it) but supposed merely for the sake of elucidation. A derangement in the structure of the eye sometimes occasions us to see a really straight line, crooked. Here the faulty form is due to some imperfection in the physical organ, and it might possibly be said by those whose opinions I am controverting (although I will not attribute the doctrine to them in this imaginary case) that the external world furnishes the straight line and the mind furnishes the crookedness: but this would manifestly be to confuse the optical properties of the eye, which are external physical facts, ascertainable only by observation through the senses, with the phenomena of consciousness, which in this case may be simply described as "seeing a crooked line." The mind "adds" or "furnishes" nothing: it is here the perceiving entity only. The

organic apparatus is what enables us to see a line when placed before us, and it is a derangement in that apparatus which causes us to see the line crooked \*,— which occasions the particular state of consciousness so described. It must be obvious that the state of consciousness cannot modify itself, which would be implied in the assertion that the mind contributes or furnishes the crookedness (or indeed anything else) to the object.

The only thing furnished by the mind (to speak in the language of the doctrine under examination) is the discernment. If it be said that no one would be so absurd as to maintain the opinion here supposed, I reply, perhaps not in so glaring a shape, but substitute “colour” for “crookedness” and you have the precise doctrine of some eminent philosophers.

If you take the trouble of looking back on what I have written in this letter, you will probably be struck with the numerous forms of fallacy which have arisen from an imperfect discernment or want of discernment that our perception of the external world is a simple fact of consciousness, not requiring, and not susceptible of, explanation.

\* The case of a straight stick, partly immersed in water, being seen bent, furnishes an instance where the apparent flexure is owing not to the organ but to the two different inorganic *media*, through which the rays refracted from the two different parts of the stick are transmitted. The percipient mind has nothing to do with originating these circumstances, but is affected by them.

Thus, as we have just seen, it is contended by some philosophers that we know only our subjective states, and merely infer the existence of an external world: by others that an external world does not exist: by others that we do not know external things in themselves: by others that the qualities we perceive in external objects are first put by us into the objects: by others that part of what we perceive is furnished by ourselves and part by the things without us.

These are all so many struggles of speculative minds with a difficulty of their own raising. The plain truth seems to have been too simple for them to accept, and they have strangely wandered abroad in search of what they had left behind at home.

In my next letter, I purpose to consider the other causes already enumerated of the prominent characteristics of the same philosophy.



## LETTER XII.

## THE PROMINENT CHARACTERISTICS OF GERMAN PHILOSOPHY AND THEIR CAUSES (IN CONTINUATION).

IN pursuance of my plan, I now come to the second circumstance to which I attribute the prominent characteristics of German speculation.

It consists in treating the so-called faculties of the mind as real and distinct entities.

This I have elsewhere so fully pointed out in the writings of authors, English, French, and German, that I must content myself on the present occasion with doing little more than referring to the previous letters in which the subject is explained.

It is, perhaps, more conspicuous in Kant than in any of his successors.

With the larger number of these philosophers, (it may be remarked,) whatever becomes of the other faculties, the *reason* figures as a very important independent entity, and is charged with the most various functions. Thus Schelling talks of the absolute reason embodying itself in inorganic matter—also as entering as an organic law into the germs of vegetable life—further as coming to consciousness in animated nature, until in man it

reaches the stage of self-consciousness, than which it has hitherto got no higher in its range through organized beings. Here, as in the other examples I have cited, we have a description of wholly fictitious events, arising from the original personification of reason. Unfortunately for the philosopher, there is (as it seems almost needless to repeat) no such entity as absolute reason, and consequently no embodying or entering or coming to consciousness on the part of this imaginary power. There is reasoning in abundance in the world, both demonstrative and contingent, but it is always a particular act or series of such acts done by an individual living being.

The following account of some of the doctrines of Jacobi will serve to illustrate how philosophers vary in their descriptions of what the faculties do, and how little likely they are to agree in their psychological views so long as they do not adopt the simple plan of classifying and explaining operations, instead of creating powers and partitioning mental territories:

“In his [Jacobi’s] view, reason was something wholly different from that logical faculty which Kant had, in his theoretical philosophy, represented it to be. Jacobi thought that just as our senses are a faculty by which we have immediate perception of what in the province of corporeity has existence for us, so reason is that sense or faculty by which we have immediate perception of that which

in the supersensual sphere of mind and intelligence has existence for us." \*

On this it may be observed, without entering upon other comments, that since there is no criterion by which to judge whether one philosopher's description of "reason" is more correct than that of another, the assignment of functions is in a measure arbitrary; each speculator is at liberty to comprehend in his award what the other leaves out, and after all no progress will be made by any of them in the classification of the facts which constitute our knowledge of man as a sensitive and intellectual being. If, on the other hand, they content themselves with describing a mental operation they can scarcely fail to agree in the main as to the particulars to be comprehended under it, and, should they differ, every reader may decide the matter thus reduced to its simplest form, by the test of his own consciousness.

Sometimes we find the so-called faculties designated by abstract terms, as in the following description of a doctrine ascribed to Kant :

"In every perception, receptivity and spontaneity are inseparably connected and co-operate together. The former furnishes the material, the latter the form of all experience."

Here pure abstractions are converted into active agents, each having its distinct function yet co-

\* Chalybäus, *Historical Development*, p. 84. Edersheim's translation.

operating with the other ; the first "furnishing" substances, the second shapes. If any real fact lurks under this phraseology, all that can be said is that it is pretty effectually disguised: it may possibly be the simple truth that we generalize and reason from the facts we perceive.

In another author\*, we find what I have before termed mental incidents undergoing the process of personification: "representations" are described as engaged with each other in a struggle,—as being thrust back or thrust aside,—as waiting on the threshold of consciousness for the favourable moment when they may be enabled once more to rise up,—as operating in the dark,—as becoming feelings, and eventually desires, and even volitions.

Of all such descriptions, outrageously figurative as they are and at the best full of imaginary events, it may be affirmed that whatever modicum of meaning they may shadow forth they never can do anything but confuse and perplex the science of mind; they are signal and lamentable departures from that true method of philosophical investigation which brings forward none but real facts and states them in the simplest language.

3. The next source in my enumeration, which contributes to the vagueness, obscurity, and confusion of the philosophy before us, is the creation of fictitious entities out of the mere forms of lan-

\* Herbart.

guage in reference to physical objects and events — the personification of material generalisations and abstractions ; or, to express it differently, the practice of ascribing a distinct and independent existence to the signification of general and abstract words, and, it may be added, of collective and complex terms, concerning the external world.\* These are doubtless indispensable forms of expression in speaking both of mind and of matter, but the moment you make them the *bases* of separate entities you are in imminent danger of falling into vagueness and error and the assumption of imaginary events. It may be said, indeed, that some noted systems of metaphysical speculation consist of little else than fictitious processes, described as being performed or exhibited or undergone by

\* The tendency of mankind to personifications is amusingly exemplified in an incident recorded in "The Discovery of the North-West Passage," by Captain McClure. During the time the "Investigator" was frozen in the ice, there happened to be a remarkable rise of temperature, from 2° *minus* to 24° *plus* of Fahrenheit. "This sudden change was far from being pleasant to the crew, who had put on their winter clothing and felt the heat oppressive. The old hands, however, warned the novices against 'being fools enough to pull their clothes off on account of such a bit of sunshine, for perhaps in an hour's time *Zero* would be about again.' *Zero*, it must be observed, was invariably referred to as a veritable foe, having an actual existence, and was to be combated as they would do the Arch-Enemy," p. 130. The last part of the statement is at once instructive and suggestive.

fictitious entities of one or other of the kinds which have been pointed out.\*

This is especially true of the writings of the later German philosophers, where at every step you meet with assertions of events or operations which you are not internally conscious of and which you cannot externally observe — assertions which would never have been made had there been a due appreciation of the nature of general and abstract language.

4. Three of the causes which I have here classed under distinct heads are so intimately allied and so frequently intermixed that I have, in some degree, anticipated the elucidation of the last of them; and what I have further to remark will serve to illustrate both the preceding and the present divisions.

It is certainly not necessary to travel any great way through the systems of German philosophy, or even any one of them, for the purpose in view. It

\* I am happy in being able to corroborate some of my views on the present subject by the following passage from an eminent living writer, with whom, as several of the preceding Letters show, I do not always find myself in accordance: "This misapprehension of the import of general language constitutes Mysticism, a word so much oftener written and spoken than understood. Whether in the Vedas, in the Platonists, or in the Hegelians, mysticism is neither more nor less than ascribing objective existence to the subjective creations of the mind's own faculties, to mere ideas of the intellect; and believing that, by watching and contemplating these ideas of its own making, it can read in them what takes place in the world without."—*A System of Logic, by J. S. Mill*, vol. ii. p. 364.

will be sufficient to select a few examples of what I wish to point out.

One very remarkable set of these imaginary transactions may be attributed to a lavish employment, and an incessant personification, of the general term *nature*, which is a word requiring from its various senses to be used with great care and discrimination. I scarcely need say that there is no separate entity indicated by the term, which is a mere form of language applied to designate sometimes the aggregate of actual existences, and sometimes the constitution of particular objects, or the qualities of things; besides possibly other acceptations. Let us see, however, how the word is employed.

We are told that “*nature* tends throughout towards individuation. Its progress in the grand total has been a distinguishing of that which primitively was undistinguished, an unfolding of that which was undeveloped and comprehended together in the subjectivity, hence an individualising into different parts, and again of those parts amongst themselves, yet in such a manner that the positive essence remains eternally that which is unitous in each and all, just as *nature* itself surrounds, as an invisible and eternal bond, each and all, and unites them into a whole.”

“If *nature*” (the same writer\* proceeds) “is thus

\* Schelling.

looked upon in general as *one* infinite organism, then every part of it is only serviceable to the whole, and has by itself no existence and no aim." . . .

Again "It (nature) aims as much to exhibit relative totalities (wholenesses) in the individual, as on the other hand it again swallows up all these totalities in the one grand organism, as being only part totalities. Hence the universal bond manifests or affirms itself relatively again in the individual and exhibits in the latter the form of totality." Here we have a description of purely hypothetical transactions of a hypothetical agent, the precise signification of the whole of which I will not venture to surmise except for my own private edification. Two or three of the positions are curious enough, especially those relating to the circumambient bond.

If there is no separate existence corresponding to the word nature, but when used in its widest sense it can mean nothing but the aggregate of individual objects or operations, then in the assertion that "nature surrounds each and all and unites them in a whole" either there is no real meaning except the mere truism that existing things taken together form a totality, or we have the description of an imaginary event or condition. Construed literally the description of nature surrounding all things is simply nugatory, and is much the same as predicating that a man surrounds himself.

Again, when nature is said "to *aim* to exhibit relative totalities in the individual," this is a mere



figure of speech scarcely worthy of appearing in any philosophical explanation except professedly as a figure, and when this nature is further described as swallowing up all these totalities in one grand organism, although exhibiting in the individual the form of totality, we can consider the entire description only as either simply unmeaning or asserting that individual objects, while being parts in relation to the grand whole, may yet be considered as wholes in themselves — which is at the best a mere platitude.

There is another abstraction, “the absolute,” which plays a great part in this philosophy.

Thus in one work “the absolute” is spoken of as “unfolding itself into the totality of what is.”

In another; “the absolute” is described as “having intuition of itself,” and again the absolute itself is designated as “living reason.”

The term absolute used as a substantive is, in fact, simply an abstract word implying nothing more than absoluteness, and can have no meaning until it is connected with some real existence.

We may speak of absolute power or absolute wisdom, meaning power without limit and wisdom without imperfection; and even these phrases can call up only concrete ideas — the idea of a being absolutely powerful and perfectly wise, or powerful and wise in a degree to which we can assign no limits — an indefinite degree.

A similar remark may be applied to the phrase "the infinite," which is an abstract term equivalent to infinitude or infiniteness, and can be connected with no clear idea in our minds except an idea of some particular object or combination of objects; nor, when so connected, can it be more in meaning than the word indefinite.

We have seen above that nature is styled the universal bond: but in other places we find "the absolute" is designated by the same title: and we are further told that the absolute has differentiated itself into light and gravity and is identical with the material world.\*

In such phrases as these we really have the essence of fiction; they describe purely imaginary events and the only grain of meaning we can by the utmost ingenuity extract from them is what we scarcely needed to be told—that there are such things as light and gravitating bodies in the universe.

Similar extravagancies abound.

"Light," says one author, is "the thinking of nature," or rather "the intuition of herself by herself."

"We of mankind," says the same (or another), "are, as it were, only the innumerable eyes by which the infinite world-spirit contemplates itself."

In another place we are gravely told that man has within himself the principle of *Meity*, a phraseo-

\* Schelling.

logy which rivals the *quiddity* and *hicceity* of the schools.

In these three last extracts, the only truths I can discover are, that light is light, that mankind are conscious beings, and that an individual man is himself and not another man — truths which might have been kept back without any serious detriment to philosophy.

Regarding the passages literally, I can find in them only the description of imaginary conditions or events.

It is a fiction that light is “thinking;” it is a fiction that the world-spirit contemplates itself through mankind as through so many eyes; it is a fiction that man contains within himself an abstract entity here styled the principle of *Meity*. In reference to this last expression I may add that the most curious philosophical treatment is experienced by “ME.” In the above passage it is turned into an abstraction: while in another place, it is, like the rules of a law-court, *made absolute*; we are told there is “an absolute *me* in the broad ground of which every individual *me* has struck root.”

This is astounding enough, but, in the following sentences we reach the climax of extravagance and self-contradiction in the creation of imaginary personages and events.

“Being and naught” (gravely asseverates a celebrated philosopher \*) “are identical.”

\* Hegel.

Further, "if we analyse origination [literally *becoming*] it is found, that it is a continuous transition from being into naught and a continuous coming over from naught into being."

Comment on this is scarcely required :

"The force of *fiction* could no farther go."

I will venture, however, to remark that if being and naught are identical, the transition of one into the other — the transition of the same thing into the same thing — is a most extraordinary process : and when it again happens "may we" (as the poet ejaculated in reference to the future rides of John Gilpin), "may we be there to see."

You must excuse this little spirt of levity on so weighty a subject, for it is impossible to treat some of the doctrines under consideration with uniform seriousness.

"To laugh were want of goodness or of grace,  
But to be grave exceeds all power of face."

## LETTER XIII.

## THE PROMINENT CHARACTERISTICS OF GERMAN PHILOSOPHY AND THEIR CAUSES (IN CONTINUATION).

It may be objected, perhaps, that it is unfair to take single sentences without the context, wrenched from their places in that system of philosophy of which they merely form a part.

And so perhaps it might be were my object to enter into a confutation of the systematic doctrines of the several treatises containing the passages cited: but my principal design being to show the errors flowing from the personification or erection into distinct entities of abstractions and generalities, and especially the multiplicity of fictitious or imaginary objects and events which pervade philosophy and are in a great measure consequent on this practice, the end may be attained by quoting even single propositions provided they clearly manifest the characteristics in question. And I scarcely need to say that the writings on which I am animadverting do not merely exhibit these characteristics in an incidental way and at long intervals, but are almost wholly made up of them.

Nevertheless, to meet the preceding objection as

far as I can do it consistently with that brevity of discussion which is all that such speculations are worth, I will select some one systematic doctrine for particular examination, and try whether we can obtain a different result.

With the same view to brevity, I will take the exposition of the doctrine from the pages of some author who endeavours to present it in a succinct form and a popular style.

The following is an explanation of one part of Hegel's philosophy by a recent English expositor :

“Take any object whatever and ask how it becomes to us a real existing idea or thing (for with Hegel these two are the same). Philosophers ordinarily say, that when we have a perception there is implied the mind or subject that perceives on the one side, and the object which is perceived on the other, the two communicating by some unknown process. The pure idealist, it is true, denies the reality of the object, and regards it as the production of the subject ; but Schelling had exploded this notion, and introduced the doctrine of identity, according to which we must admit a real subject and a real object, but must regard them as two corresponding manifestations of the same absolute existence. Hegel, however, now goes one step further in his analysis. He says that there is neither subject nor object separately considered, but that they both owe their existence and reality to each other. The only real existence then is *the*

*relation*; the whole universe is a universe of relations; subject and object which appear contradictory to each other are really one — not one in the sense of Schelling, as being opposite poles of the same absolute existence, but one inasmuch as their relation forms the very idea, or the very thing itself."\*

A brief consideration of the nature of abstract language suffices to show that this doctrine is just the reverse of the truth. So far from the only real things being relations, there is not a single real entity in the universe answering to that name.

There are innumerable objects in the world which are *related* to each other in a variety of ways, but there are no separate existences represented by the term relations.

The latter term is, in truth, a generic word of a peculiar character; it is a common name for a number of abstractions. Thus resemblance, distance, fitness, successiveness, symmetry, equality, are all abstract terms; in each case, that which is denoted by them is designated a relation, and none of these terms, the last included, can do more than raise up the ideas of particular objects in pairs or groups.

It is scarcely needful to enforce here the truth explained in a former letter, that all abstract phrases may be thrown into concrete language without any loss of meaning. When we say that

\* An Historical and Critical View of the Speculative Philosophy of Europe, by J. D. Morell, vol. ii. p. 136.

a portrait has a resemblance to the original, or that one simple flower, a daisy for instance, has a resemblance to another daisy, we express no more in each instance than that one resembles the other. The phrases "they resemble one another," and "they have a resemblance to one another," or "there is a resemblance between them," are perfectly equivalent. The relation termed resemblance has thus no independent existence, is no separate entity; and the same is true of all other relations. Pardon me for repeating these familiar truths.

Instead then of the whole universe being a universe of relations, which would be a universe of nothings, it is a universe of related things. The realities are not, as taught by Hegel, the relations between objects, but the objects themselves between which the so-called relations have place, or, in other words, which are variously related to each other.

Mark again the singular reasoning that subject and object are one, because the relation between them forms the very thing itself; which can scarcely be surpassed in self-contradiction and confusion of thought, except it be by the preceding assertion that both subject and object owe their existence to each other — the ingenious story of the Kilkenny cats inverted.

I am not sure that I ever met with a finer instance of the absurdities into which the creation of fictitious entities out of the abstractions of language, can betray a reputedly powerful intellect.



If this should seem severe, pray observe for a moment the contradictions in the theory animadverted upon.

Subject and object are one, yet there is a relation between them: which necessarily implies that they are two.

They owe their existence to each other, the former as father producing the latter as child, and then the latter begetting its own parent.

Yet notwithstanding their existence is thus marvellously brought about, they are not real things; *i. e.* they do not really exist.

And hence, although there is a relation between them, it is a relation between two nothings; and such relations between nothings, are the only realities in the universe.

If the student of philosophy would always, or at least in cases of importance, adopt the rule of throwing the abstract language in which it is so frequently couched into a concrete form\*, he would find it a powerful aid in dealing with the obscurities and perplexities of metaphysical speculation. He would then see clearly the character of the immense mass of nothings which constitute what passes for philosophy.

The doctrine of Hegel above commented upon, is at once disclosed in all its absurdity when this effective touchstone is applied to it.

\* See on this subject "The Theory of Reasoning" by the present author, Appendix.

The rule here recommended is formed from a view of the nature of general and abstract terms : but there is another rule drawn from the consideration of general propositions or laws, which he will find of no less utility whether the language is abstract or concrete.

In a preceding letter I have shown that from their very nature, general rules, laws, or propositions, can be legitimately formed from nothing but particular instances.

If, consequently, such a proposition has any real meaning, it will be always possible to find some instance in exemplification of it. Let the student then endeavour to discover such an instance. If this cannot be done ; if no instance can be adduced ; if the general proposition should elude all attempts to bring it to this homely test ; it may be set down as a mere empty form of words. If on the other hand an instance can be found, the falsity of the general proposition (should it be false) will come out.

Let us try this rule on a passage from Schelling :

“ The lifeless and unconscious products of nature are only the unsuccessful attempts of nature to reflect itself.”

Well a quartz crystal is a lifeless and unconscious product of nature ; in what sense is it an unsuccessful attempt of nature at self-reflection ? If I were to follow the philosopher in his personification, I should say, that the crystal, although lifeless and

unconscious, is a successful attempt of nature to put forth a beautiful production. "Nature," however, as here used being an aggregate word signifying no particular thing or entity but the whole universe, it is nugatory — a mere flourish of fancy quite appropriate in poetry or rhetoric — to ascribe to it an attempt (which is the act of an intelligent being) to accomplish any end and especially such an end as self-reflection — whatever that may mean. In the passage quoted there are manifestly no real facts corresponding to the assertion, and it is only the generality of the proposition which can give it the semblance of a meaning. Demand an example and it vanishes into nothing.

Take as another proposition on which to try the test, the extraordinary passage quoted in a preceding letter.

"If we analyse origination [becoming] it is found that it is a continuous transition from being into naught and a continuous coming over from naught into being."

Let any one task his recollection or rack his invention to the utmost, he will be unable to discover or even imagine a single instance in which this is true. The annihilation of matter, the "transition of being into naught," as well as the converse process "the coming over of naught into being," is to man an unknown occurrence.\*

\* On this point I may perhaps be pardoned for introducing a short quotation from one of my own works. "In the pre-

The inevitable conclusion is that the author has here suffered himself to be imposed upon by words, and has announced an analysis of "origination" destitute of real meaning although not of conspicuous absurdity. If it should be alleged that I have mistaken his drift, I reply that I should be glad to find I had, inasmuch as it would show that there is one speculative folly in the world less than I supposed.

sent course of Nature, we have no evidence of the production of new matter,—not an iota of evidence; no philosopher of modern times has ever maintained that we have. It is the same with the extinction of matter: no act of extinction, no phenomenon of annihilation, has ever yet crossed the inquiries of the searcher into the secrets of Nature. The chemist, who pursues substances through all their changes, finds them, indeed, assume new forms, enter into new combinations, cast off their sensible properties, and escape all tests of their existence but the grasp of gravitation; yet in all these metamorphoses (as far at least as ponderable matter is concerned) he loses not a particle of the original quantity."— *On the General Principles of Physical Investigation*, being one of the "Discourses on Various Subjects," p. 160, A.D. 1852.

## LETTER XIV.

## THE CAUSATION OF VOLUNTARY ACTIONS.

ON my view of the proper way in which the philosophy of consciousness should be treated, namely by regarding operations and affections instead of faculties, and shaping our language accordingly, a number of puzzling questions appear to me to be got rid of with comparative ease.

Amongst these, if I mistake not, is the controversy as to the so-called freedom of the Will; which is literally the freedom of a nonentity.

As the Will is merely a personification of our acts of willing, there ought, in consonance with the preceding remark, to be an evident advantage gained by dropping the personification and throwing the question into a different form. In no case, perhaps, except in treating of "the Reason," have graver disputes and more embarrassing perplexities arisen from the creation of a fictitious entity than in the instance before us. We may disencumber ourselves of almost all these by resolutely abstaining from the use of this formidable noun, and putting our meaning into the plainest and most direct expressions.

What the vexed question really amounts to, may be stated as follows :

Are we free to perform those movements of the body and those operations of the mind which are admitted by all to be effects of willing or to be voluntary? There is no occasion to embarrass the inquiry by considering dubious cases : let us take such alone as exhibit undoubted volitions.

Now it is very clear that we are quite free to do these acts if we please or will to do them.

Thus the act of stretching out my arm is one of the motions produced by willing, and whenever I please to do it I can do it, or, what is the same thing, I am free to do it.

The expressions " I am free to do an action if I please," and " I can do it if I please," are clearly equivalent.

Where then in a matter so stated can there be any room for doubt or controversy? It seems almost absurd to make a question of it at all.

On close examination nevertheless it will be found, that, when reduced to its simplest form the disputed point is, in reality, not whether we are free to act in certain matters as we please, for no one, I believe, disputes that we are, but whether there are regular causes (as there are in physical events) which bring us into the state of " pleasing or willing " to act in the ways in which we do act.

This question, although evidently a question of fact, it might be impossible to determine to the

satisfaction of every body, were the causes referred to not distinctly assignable: but, if there are circumstances which can be assigned as regularly preceding certain volitions, so that when the circumstances take place the voluntary acts can be foreseen and predicted, then the doctrine that voluntary acts depend on, or are the effects of, regular causes in the same way as physical events are, cannot be doubted without self-contradiction. Now nothing is easier than to show that there are circumstances which can be so assigned and of which the results can be so predicted.

Cases in point abound in the ordinary course of daily life, although they are very commonly overlooked or not viewed in the aspect in which it will be my design to exhibit them.

In a dissertation which I published above thirty years ago\*, "On the Uniformity of Causation explaining the General Principle of all Evidence and Expectation," I adduce numerous examples of the confidence with which we habitually anticipate the results of voluntary acts from causes put in motion either by ourselves or by others.

As the Treatise is little known, has long been out of print, and is not likely to be soon republished, I may be permitted to quote from it, as a prelude to what follows, two or three passages of considerable length which state the matter as clearly and

\* A. D. 1826.

succinctly as I could hope to do were I to attempt a fresh exposition, availing myself of the right of an author to make alterations in his own text, although in the present case they will be either merely verbal or introduced for the sake of compression.

“It is surprising that this connection between motives and actions should have ever been theoretically questioned, when every human being every day of his existence is practically depending upon its truth ; when men are perpetually staking pleasure and fortune, and reputation and even life itself on the very principle that they speculatively reject. It is, in truth, intermingled in all our schemes, projects, and achievements. In the address of the orator, in the treatise of the author, in the enactments of the legislator, in the manœuvres of the warrior, in the edicts of the monarch, it is equally implied. Examine any one of these. Take, for example, the operations of a campaign. A general, in the exercise of his authority over the army which he commands, cannot move a step without taking for granted that the minds of his soldiers will be determined by the motives presented to them. When he directs his aide-de-camp to bear a message to an officer in another part of the field, he calculates upon his obedience with as little mistrust as he reckons upon the stability of the ground on which he stands, or upon the magnifying power of the telescope in his hand. When he orders his soldiers to wheel, to deploy, to form a



square, to fire a battery, is he less confident in the result than he is when he performs some physical operation,—when he draws a sword, pulls a trigger, or seals a despatch? It is obvious that throughout all his operations, in marches and encampments, and sieges and battles, he calculates as fully on the volitions of his men as on the strength of his fortifications or the reach of his guns. \* \* \*

“In commercial transactions of all sorts there is the same reliance. In the simple circumstance of a merchant's draft on his banker payable on a specified day, we have it strikingly exemplified. We can scarcely conceive an instance of more perfect reliance on the production of voluntary acts by the motives presented to human beings, than this common occurrence. The merchant dismisses his draft into the commercial world without the least doubt that however circuitous the course, it will at last find some individual to present it for payment on the appointed day, and that his banker will finally pay it. Here we have in fact a series of volitions, the result of which is looked for with unhesitating confidence, with a confidence quite equal to that with which the material of the draft is expected to retain the handwriting upon it.

“The principal illustration, however, which I have to adduce on this subject is the science of Political Economy, especially as it will afford at the same time an opportunity of exhibiting the real basis of this science, which has not perhaps been

fully understood, even by some of those who have been successful in the discovery and elucidation of its truths.

“The principle which is at the bottom of all the reasonings of Political Economy is in fact the uniformity with which visible or assignable circumstances operate in producing voluntary acts.

“To exemplify:—

“It is a received conclusion in Political Economy that where competition is left open there is a tendency to equality in the profits of the various branches of commerce. If any one branch becomes much more lucrative than the rest, a flow of capital to that department soon restores the equilibrium. This general law is explained with perspicuity by Adam Smith in the case of the builder, whose trade, as he shows, must yield sufficient profit to pay him the ordinary interest of money on the capital expended and also to replace that capital within a certain term of years. If the trade of a builder affords at any time a much greater profit than this, it will soon draw so much capital from other trades as will reduce the profit to its proper level. If it affords at any time much less than this, other trades will soon draw so much capital from it as will again raise that profit.

“Now when Dr. Smith asserts that the trade of a builder under the circumstances supposed, will draw capital from other trades, he is not stating a physical fact which will take place in consequence

of some material attraction, but he is laying down a result which will ensue from the known principles of the human mind ; or, in other words, from motives acting on society with certainty and precision. The secession of capital from other trades is not a mechanical effect, like the motion of water to its level, but the consequence of a number of voluntary actions. It is an event which is produced through the medium of human volitions, although we reason upon it with as much certainty as on the tendency of water to an equilibrium.

“ In employing such figurative expressions as these, in exalting trade and capital into spontaneous agents, and investing them with certain qualities and tendencies, we are apt to be deceived by our own language ; to imagine that we have stated the whole of the truth, and to lose sight of all those mental operations concerned in the result which we so concisely express. Let us reflect for a moment on all the intellectual and moral processes, which lie hid under the metaphorical description of the trade of a builder drawing capital from other trades. To produce this result, the fact must transpire that the trade is more than ordinarily lucrative ; this circumstance must excite the cupidity or emulation of a number of individuals ; these individuals must deliberate on the prudence or propriety of embarking in it ; they must resolve upon their measures ; they must take steps for borrowing money, or withdraw capital before appro-

priated to other purposes and apply it to this ; in doing which they will probably have to enter into bargains, make sales, draw bills, and perform a hundred other voluntary actions; the result of all which operations will be the employment of a greater portion of the labour of the community in building than formerly, and a smaller portion in other pursuits ; and all these, with a number of other occurrences, are masked under the phrase of one trade drawing capital from another.

“ It is the same throughout the whole science of Political Economy. The rise and fall of prices, the fluctuations in exchange, the vicissitudes of supply and demand, the return of excessive issues of paper on the bankers, the disappearance of specie, the depreciation of the currency, and various other events are to be traced to certain determinate causes acting with regularity on the minds of individuals and bodies of men : all these phrases are in fact expressions of the results of voluntary actions. Such circumstances furnish as striking instances of perfect vaticination in regard to the acts of human beings as any that can be adduced in regard to material occurrences. Political Economy is, in a great measure, an inquiry into the operation of motives, and proceeds on the principle that the volitions of mankind are under the influence of precise and ascertainable causes.” \*

\* Essay on the Uniformity of Causation, chap. vi.

Thus when the vague language about the freedom of the Will—the freedom, as before said, of a nonentity—is set aside, the real question assumes a shape which presents little ground for difference of opinion.

Voluntary actions are proved to be dependent on regular and, in many cases, distinctly assignable causes, by the facts that we habitually predict them and calculate with the utmost confidence that they will ensue from the motives which we present to the intelligent beings whose conduct we wish to influence or direct.

“Well but after all,” it may be said, “when we thus predict or calculate upon the voluntary actions of our fellow-creatures, we merely regard them as *likely to happen*; there is, no necessity in the case; they may or may not occur; a sort of latitude prevails in these things; we are not obliged to resort to the supposition of a dependence on regular or invariable causes.”

And most assuredly the actions so predicted are only what come under the class probable or likely to happen; but as assuredly no probability can be ascribed to any events (if such can be conceived) which do not depend on regular antecedents. The moment you admit an event to be probable, you pronounce it to be the consequence of invariable causes. It is our ignorance of all the causes in operation which makes the events to us only probable: an acquaintance with the whole would

produce perfect certainty ; and practically, as I have shown, our knowledge in the case of many voluntary actions is so complete that there is but an infinitesimal admixture of doubt, corresponding to the same minute quantity of ignorance. In this respect they resemble innumerable physical events which vary in degrees of probability to us, according as our knowledge of the causes in operation is greater or less ; but no one surely supposes that this difference in probability is owing to some of the events being more loosely connected (to adopt for the moment an unmeaning phrase) than others with the series of which they form a part.\*

Variations in probability are entirely due to variations in the state of our own knowledge ; and this is equally true whether the events in question are of a physical or moral character.

The preceding exposition has been employed in elucidating two facts which can scarcely be controverted by the most prejudiced of mankind ; namely, 1st. that voluntary actions are not only constantly predicted but purposely produced by the motives which human beings present to each other ; and

\* “The word *chance* serves conveniently to veil our ignorance : we employ it to explain effects of whose causes we are ignorant. To one who could foresee all things there would be no chance ; and the events which now appear to us most extraordinary would have then natural and necessary causes, in the same way as the commonest occurrences.”— *Letters on the Theory of Probabilities*, by M. A. Quetelet, Letter 2.

2ndly. that in performing such actions we nevertheless do as we please: we act with perfect freedom: an option is presented to us, and we choose to do the actions rather than not do them.

Mankind, however, seem not to understand the relation in which these two facts (both incontrovertibly true) stand to each other. It is generally apprehended that there is some discrepancy or inconsistency or incompatibility between them: but for my own part I see none; and if both are real facts, they cannot, I scarcely need say, be discordant or incompatible one with the other.

Why should there seem to be any incompatibility between your doing as you please, and my predicting what you will do, and even causing you to please to do it?

My purposely producing in you the state of pleasing to do a thing—which implies of course my foreseeing the action,—is not compelling you to do it, but the reverse.

For example, when I offer to a bookseller the price of a volume exposed for sale in his shop, and thus bring his mind into the state of pleasing to part with it, as well as foresee that he will part with it, I do not put him under any necessity to sell me the book, I render him willing to do it, which is the opposite of compelling him or forcing him to surrender his property.

On the other hand it is equally plain that the circumstance of an event being in the class of

voluntary actions does not prevent me from predicting it or producing it in any human being.

In a word while my foreseeing an action, or raising in any one the wish to do it, does not necessitate or compel the performance of the action, its being voluntary is no obstacle to my foreseeing or inducing it. The two things are completely compatible. The same human actions may be willed with perfect freedom by the performer, and predicted with perfect confidence by the looker-on.



## LETTER XV.

THE CAUSATION OF VOLUNTARY ACTIONS  
(IN CONTINUATION).

THE view of voluntary actions which has been presented in the preceding letter will doubtless seem to many readers incompatible with moral responsibility, with a sense of merit and demerit, with self-satisfaction and remorse, with the justice of rewards and punishments, and in a word with all feelings of retrospective complacency and condemnation directed either to our own conduct or that of others. It will be argued that if voluntary actions are the results of regular causes, if they can be predicted, if they can be purposely produced in one human being by another, or be the issue of unavoidable circumstances, then although it is through the medium of a willing mind that they are effected, all accountability for them is destroyed.

This opinion seems natural enough, if I may judge from its extensive prevalence, but it is plain to my own understanding that the opinion has arisen from not attending to some necessary dis-

inctions which I shall endeavour to convey to you as perspicuously as I appear to myself to discern them.

In regard to moral accountability, a clear comprehension of the subject will be assisted by discriminating responsibility itself from the feeling or sense of responsibility. Responsibility itself means liability on the part of some sensitive and intelligent being to punishment for his conduct by some other sensitive and intelligent being.

In no correct sense can one being be said to be responsible to another, unless the latter has the power of inflicting upon him some evil, whether positive pain or the deprivation of pleasure — the power of affecting, in some way or other, his happiness or welfare.

But the feeling of responsibility is another thing, and the two are by no means commensurate.

Responsibility may exist without any adequate sense or apprehension of it, while conversely the apprehension of it may far exceed the reality or be wholly groundless.

If the question to be considered is, how far the doctrine which maintains that voluntary actions are the result of regular causes, takes away responsibility itself, or, in other words, liability to punishment for such actions, the solution seems simple and clear.

It is obvious that the doctrines on this point which may be held by the actors, cannot take away

the power of punishing from the being or beings in whom it is vested.

If the latter have appointed certain punishments for certain actions, the mere opinions or sentiments of those who commit them respecting the causes in operation on their own minds, can evidently be of no avail in enabling them to avoid the penalties. The acts are done and the punishments follow. Responsibility is not touched.

If on the other hand, the question to be considered is how far the doctrine diminishes or takes away the *feeling* of responsibility ; and if this feeling is regarded only as the expectation or apprehension of punishment, the solution of the inquiry also seems simple.

So long as the punishment decreed, or known to follow, remains the same, unaffected by any opinions entertained respecting it by the persons liable to be punished, there can be no reason why the apprehension of it should be weakened by such opinions.

Hence it may be presumed, the real objections intended are, that the doctrine would render the punishment of any actions unjust in itself, and cause both the perpetrator of the action and the inflictor of the punishment to feel it to be so. The sense and the odium of guilt, and the disposition to punish it would be annihilated ; remorse or compunction would be inappropriate and useless, and

moral reprobation with all other penalties inapplicable and out of place.

These are formidable considerations, but not, I think, beyond a satisfactory answer.

In reply to the objection that the doctrine would render the punishment of any action unjust, inasmuch as it teaches that a concurrence of circumstances beyond the control of the perpetrator determined him to commit it, I must take upon myself to deny that the punishment in such a case would be unjust, for the simple reason that he pleased or willed to do it. Causes beyond his control, *i. e.* which he did not will, may certainly have determined him so to please — may have brought his mind into that state — but this allegation is unavailing: it is precisely because the state of mind termed pleasing or willing was interposed between the determining circumstances, whatever they were, and the act, that he becomes justly liable to punishment; it is this which makes the act his. Suppose the act in question to be giving a blow to an unoffending fellow creature; if the striker, by whatever circumstances he was induced to commit such violence, pleased to strike, he rightly incurs the penalty consequent on the act. Had some third person seized his arm and compelled him to give the blow, he would have been manifestly free from responsibility.

It is the essential circumstance of “willing” an evil action and nothing else that constitutes moral

guilt, and where it has place, however it may have been generated, condemnation justly follows. Neither the remote nor the proximate causes of the state of mind, termed willing, have necessarily anything to do with the guilt or the innocence of the voluntary action.

This representation will not, I am aware, satisfy every one. It will be objected (and doubtless with some force) that I only *assert* the justice of punishment in the described circumstances, whereas it requires to be proved.

The objection manifestly involves a particular consideration of the meaning of the word justice — a meaning which it is easier to ask for than to furnish, except by equivalent expressions.

In order to prove my position, I must distinguish two possible significations of the term when so applied.

The proposition that the punishment of an evil action is just, may mean either that human beings feel it to be just, or that the punishment is the direct and appropriate means of preventing similar actions in future.

It would perhaps be a sufficient answer to the objection were it just in either of these senses, but I shall endeavour to show that it is just in both, and I cannot imagine any other acceptation which can be given to the term in this connection, although a delusive appearance of one might easily be presented by resorting to synonymous language.

In regard to the first interpretation, it is a fact in human nature that when evil actions are seen or known to be voluntary, they excite resentment, or, in other words, a disposition to punish the evil doers; and the infliction of punishment in some way or other for such offences is universally felt to be just; it satisfies, and does not outrage the feelings.

The only conditions necessary for the production of these sentiments are, obviously, that the act is evil or thought to be so, and that it is voluntary. These conditions existing, the sentiments of resentment towards the offender and satisfaction at his punishment follow, irrespective of the circumstances which engendered in him the state of mind called pleasing or willing to do the action.

It may be laid down as a general law, that whatever circumstances may have determined a culprit to the voluntary commission of a crime, they are not felt by his fellow creatures to exonerate him from guilt, or to render his punishment unjust.

Such is the constitution of our moral nature.

A man has committed a robbery, and is detected and apprehended. It is proved on his trial that he was the offspring of depraved parents, that from childhood he was trained in the art of stealing, that he had not been taught any other mode of getting a livelihood, and that he and his companions had been habituated to pride themselves on their skill

and felicitate each other on their success in abstracting the property of others.

Here there is an accumulation of circumstances operating with such manifest force to determine the career of the culprit, that no one who was acquainted with them could anticipate a different result ; yet he is condemned and punished, not only without violence to the moral feelings of the community, but even with the sanction of those feelings, although to thoughtful and sensitive minds there is doubtless much in the case to excite reflection, regret, commiseration, and reluctance. Punishment is felt by them to be in such circumstances a stern and repulsive necessity, but a just necessity notwithstanding. The more powerful are the causes determining culprits to the crime, the stronger is felt to be the call for counteraction by strict and undeviating penalties.

Mankind, indeed, are not invariably consistent in this matter. Their resentment of conduct is manifested somewhat irregularly, and modified by numerous circumstances. Sometimes, when the particular causes which have determined the conduct of an offender are fully set forth, the disclosure exasperates the odium excited by the offence ; and sometimes, if the inducements are found to be such as scarcely any human being could have resisted, and especially if they are discovered to have been purposely offered by specious subornation, a more lenient judgment is passed, than if the offence alone

had become known, while the inducements which led to it remained in obscurity.

The mitigation of the moral judgment in such cases, is in truth due to a variety of influences which although they are interesting to trace, cannot now be discussed, but it chiefly arises from the apparent approach which the offences make in their character to compulsory actions; and this is, in its turn, owing to the attention of the observer being fixed more expressly and minutely than it can usually be, on the circumstances determining the volitions.

The judgment, however, never undergoes more than a mitigation, and not always that, so long as it appears that the mental state of pleasing to do the action preceded it, or, in other words, that the action was voluntary.

To these views it may still perhaps be objected that if voluntary actions are regarded when evil as justly subjecting their doers to punishment, it is because men in general are incognisant or unconvinced of the doctrine that all voluntary acts are determined by involuntary circumstances, and were the doctrine incontrovertibly established and generally held, mankind would as generally feel that praise and blame, rewards and punishments, self-complacency and remorse, were alike misplaced, inappropriate, and undeserved.

In such a conclusion, I find it impossible to concur. No speculation as to the nature and force



of motives, nor any insight into the causes of voluntary actions could substantially and permanently alter our natural feelings in regard to those actions. We should still continue to like and dislike, to commend and discommend, in a word to resent them (I use the term in its widest acceptation), according to their manifest or apprehended tendency. These sentiments would in truth be confirmed by the insight here spoken of. The same perspicacity which discerned that voluntary actions are determined by regular causes, would take in the whole bearings of the question, and would discover that it is the highest wisdom in mankind to give way, within certain limits, to their instinctive resentment of each other's conduct. They would see the beneficial ends which this resentment answers, and direct it to its proper objects under the salutary restrictions which a clear apprehension of those ends would point out.

With regard to that part of the objection which insists upon such a doctrine having a tendency to weaken, and even wholly extirpate repentance and remorse, a similar answer to the one which has just been given may be returned to it. There is no greater difficulty in the latter case than the former. Remorse is a natural feeling which habit may deaden, and sympathy pervert in regard to particular offences, but which no speculative considerations as to its being useless and unreasonable can uproot.

In this respect it is similar to the grief we feel

at the loss of beloved friends, or the bitter regret with which we look back on having missed some great opportunity of distinction or happiness offered to our acceptance, but, as the event proved, unwisely declined and lost for ever, when the choice of one branch of the alternative in preference to the other involved no moral considerations.

Such grief and such regret are very little abated by the most vivid conviction that they are unavailing and irrational—nay, they are sometimes even aggravated by it \*; and although, like all strong emotions, they yield some of their strength to time, they frequently recur in sharp, sudden, and irrepressible pangs.

It is the same with remorse, which is truly bitter regret aggravated by the moral reprobation so freely lavished at all times on our neighbours, and now self-directed to our own conduct; and also by a deep sense of the condemnation which that conduct must excite wherever it may become known.

And surely, if mere speculative considerations or mere intellectual conclusions as to uselessness and irrationality cannot extirpate or even mollify bitter sorrow unaccompanied by moral self-reproach, neither can they extinguish or abate that compound state of passion in which regret is combined at once with self-condemnation and with a strong impression or apprehension of the reprobation of others.

\* "I weep the more because I weep in vain."—*Gray*.

Remorse, you may rest assured, is, as well as resentment, perfectly safe from extirpation by speculative doctrines.

The remark which I made in a preceding page on the wisdom of resentment, has almost forestalled what I have to offer on the second interpretation of the epithet *just* when applied to punishment, namely, in the sense of being the direct and appropriate means of preventing evil actions in future. In this acceptation no one will probably deny that punishments are just as well as wise.

Even if mankind were rendered averse to the infliction of penalties by the doctrine under discussion, and erroneously regarded evil actions no longer as crimes to be avenged, but as misfortunes to be pitied, they could not fail to see that punishments are the indispensable means of repressing offences, and that if such actions were really free from guilt according to their misconstruction of the doctrine, the most relentless punishment of them would be equally innocent ; so that virtue and vice being set aside and all human deeds placed on a moral level, the question with every one would simply be as to the efficacy of punishments in warding off evil. Men would resort to them without the slightest resentment or moral reprobation, on the same principle that they put up conducting rods to protect their houses from lightning or raise embankments to prevent their lands from being flooded by a river. Happily, however, mankind have

the uneradicable feeling of resentment to stimulate and enforce what would be otherwise a languid and intermitting application of means speculatively discerned to be proper and efficacious.

In a case somewhat parallel—the sustenance of the animal frame—we are also not left to mere intellectual discernment in respect of the consequences to be secured or averted; we are not so left either as to the kinds of food, or the frequency of taking it, or the quantity in which it should be taken, but are urged on by the recurrent appetites of hunger and thirst, which effectually prevent health and strength from being impaired by that fitful and desultory attention to their preservation which would be the consequence of regulating the business of eating and drinking by mere considerations of what is needful for keeping up the proper condition of the body.

What I have here attempted to show may be summed up in a few words.

Men associate together, and are from constitution and circumstances unavoidably benefited and injured, pleased and displeased by each other's actions, and they not only instinctively resent them (I again use the term in its widest sense), but finding from experience that they can produce or prevent certain actions by applying certain modes of resentment, they *do* apply them; their instinctive feelings are guided by intelligence; they praise and blame, reward and punish prospectively as well as retro-

spectively, and they reap beneficial effects from so doing.

No rational end can be answered by abstaining from such a course. There can be no reason, on the principles here laid down, that resentment should not be entertained, and that an evil doer should not be reprobated and punished.

Punishment inflicted on such an offender is not, as I have shown, *felt* as unjust because he willed to do the action, and it is our nature to resent a voluntary offence, whatever may have been the motives which brought the culprit into the state of pleasing to do it.

Nor can it, as I have also shown, be considered unjust in reason any more than in feeling, because punishment is calculated to affect his mental state in such a manner that he will please to act differently in future; and it is, in fact, the great and direct means of preventing offences by its effects on others as well as on himself.

The only indispensable conditions for the justice of punishment are that the actions be evil in intention and voluntary; and it is obvious that the great end of preventing such actions should form the limit to the satisfaction of the instinctive and salutary resentment which it is our nature to feel. Within that limit the feeling may be legitimately indulged, but whenever the penalty imposed is greater than is absolutely necessary for the attainment of the beneficial end, the excess is mere

wanton cruelty—the infliction of misery for no purpose; the production of needless evil in one form with the avowed aim of repressing it in another when the repression is already adequately provided for.

So in the parallel case of the physical organisation to which I have before adverted. The end in view of maintaining the health of the body should always limit the satisfaction of hunger and thirst and the enjoyment of the pleasures of the palate. So far as the appetites can be gratified within that limit, they may be wisely indulged, but to push the gratification beyond it, is to sacrifice the end to the means, the greater good to the less; to purchase small pleasures at the expense of great pains.

In this view punishments are seen to be alike just and beneficial. They are indispensable parts in that system of existence, of activity, of thought, and of feeling in which we find ourselves as human beings involved.

It is when the discursive thinker ascends, as it were, higher than the system, and takes, so to speak, an outside view of what is going on within; when he discerns that the voluntary actions committed are the effects of circumstances operating without alternative on the mind to produce volitions, and that these volitions take their place in the various series of causes and effects devolving from the past and flowing forward to the future,—it is then that he is led to question, for the moment, the absolute

justice of resentment and of the penal measures prompted by the feeling and in unison with it.

At this high point of view, however, where darkly looms the question of the origin of evil, he cares not perhaps, long to maintain himself; and he descends to the more circumscribed speculation that the determining circumstances, the volitions, the actions, the resentment, the punishments, and the consequences of the punishments, are to be looked upon as internal to the system, as inter-hominal (if I may venture to coin a word), as adapted to each other, as the working of wheels among themselves; and he acquiesces in the necessity, the congruity, and the reasonableness of the whole.

Into the theological view of the subject I do not at present enter.

## LETTER XVI.

PHYSIOLOGY IN RELATION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
THE HUMAN MIND.

THERE is one very interesting and important subject which, at the present time, calls for special notice in any professed survey of the philosophy of mind,—I mean the connexion between the mind and the body, or, in preciser language, between the phenomena of consciousness, and the phenomena of the bodily frame, discovered like other external phenomena through the organs of the senses.

Passing over at present the doctrines of phrenology, which I shall hereafter consider, I would call your attention to the circumstance that there has, if I mistake not, lately sprung up a strong disposition to forsake, and even condemn the study of the phenomena of consciousness as such, and to magnify in importance, if not to devote almost exclusive attention to those physiological facts on which there are grounds for believing that the phenomena of consciousness depend, as well as those to which the phenomena of consciousness give rise.

Now the department of inquiry here indicated is



most assuredly deserving of all the pains which can be bestowed upon it, and I am the last person in the world to discourage or depreciate it.

But at the same time I am at a loss to see why it should be regarded as at all superseding the science of consciousness ; and since very inconsiderate and erroneous views are, in my opinion, entertained of what physiological investigation can effect in the philosophy of mind, I purpose, in as brief a manner as I can, to lay before you my thoughts on that subject at once difficult, interesting, and important.

I must set out with repeating a remark—certainly not very recondite—which I formerly brought to your recollection, that there are two classes under which all the facts in human science may be arranged—physical facts, and mental facts or facts of consciousness ; and it is of great importance for accurate thinking that they should, in every case, be discriminated from each other.

In both these sets of facts we can trace such as are co-existing, and such as are consecutive. Either of them may be investigated independently of the other, and also in certain cases dependently : or, to express it differently, physical facts may be investigated as accompanying or following each other, and so may mental facts : further physical facts of a certain order may be investigated as preceding, accompanying, or following mental facts, and conversely, certain mental facts may be investigated

as preceding, accompanying, or following physical facts.

On the one hand, according to this view, the object or aim of the physical sciences (using the term in its widest sense), is to investigate the co-existent and consecutive facts presented by the material world—the world that can be observed through our organs of sense; the vastness of which field of observation it is needless to describe.

On the other hand, the aim of the philosophy of mind is to investigate the co-existent and consecutive facts of consciousness—a narrower department than the other, but yet abounding with materials of knowledge not to be surpassed in importance.

But, agreeably to what I have already said, there is, besides these two departments, another, a third department of knowledge, which arises from the circumstance that we have a physical frame through which many of the facts of consciousness are produced, and which is itself an external object of observation, exhibiting not only facts independent of consciousness, and belonging therefore to what may be called material physiology, but also facts connected with states of consciousness as causes and effects.

Now although this department of knowledge must necessarily be taken into view in the researches of the other two, and also derive facts from them, it is sufficiently distinct to be pursued as a separate sphere of inquiry.

This point may be illustrated by the instance of Geology, which necessarily avails itself of the facts of natural philosophy and chemistry on the one hand, and the facts of natural history on the other, and yet is very properly prosecuted as a distinct line of investigation. It derives great assistance from these other sources, but is itself neither natural philosophy, nor chemistry, nor yet (in the common acceptation of the term) natural history.

The investigations which have been instituted into this connexion of mind and body, appear to have in view the solution of the following questions:—

1. Whether any and what organs, tissues, or parts of the bodily frame are connected with particular mental phenomena, either as affecting or being affected by them, over and above the organs of the senses, which are of course universally allowed to be the instruments through which certain modifications of mind are produced.

2. Whether the connexion discoverable between such parts of the body and the phenomena of consciousness, is carried on by motions in the tissues themselves; or by some subtile fluid, or ether, or imponderable substance, or some other indescribable agent pervading them.

Here we have certainly a wide and interesting field for investigation and a most unlimited one for conjecture. But supposing all the knowledge that

is desiderated in these inquiries, or (if that is beyond rational supposition) a great part of it, to be attained, it would obviously supersede neither material physiology on the one hand, nor the philosophy of consciousness on the other.

The structure and movements and physical functions of the body which are not attended by consciousness, but are wholly things of merely outward observation, would still continue to form a principal part of physiological science; and those movements or functions which are preceded or accompanied or followed by certain states of consciousness, must also be investigated as external phases of matter; nor would a knowledge of their connexion with mental phenomena enable us to understand them better as physical facts.

On the other hand, all the mental operations and feelings which may or may not have been ascertained to be connected with certain parts of the body, would have to be studied as states of consciousness, and could none of them be known to us any better in consequence of ascertaining this connexion in particular cases than they were before. The connexion when traced could not modify either the mental affections as experienced by us or the character of our knowledge of them.

The nature of such operations and feelings, or what they are in themselves, would remain the same notwithstanding the discovery of any phy-

siological dependence on tissues and organs ; and the relations traceable amongst such phenomena of consciousness would be unaffected by it.

The most complete discovery of this kind, valuable as in many respects it might be, would throw no light whatever on what perception is, what recollection is, what belief is, what reasoning is, what willing is, what joy or grief or hope or fear is ; or on the influence which these various states, operations, or affections have respectively on each other, and the dependence existing amongst them.

Take the operation of remembering, and suppose you could trace a connexion between it and certain tissues of the body, and even certain definite motions in those tissues.

This discovery, doubtless, would in many respects be exceedingly valuable, but it would not make clearer to our apprehension the nature of the act called remembering ; nor would it elucidate the mental circumstances on which remembering depends : neither would it at all affect the truths familiar to all of us that we remember best those things which have had our principal attention, and that we remember them very much in the order in which they have come to our knowledge ; that we sometimes suddenly forget the past, and sometimes as suddenly recollect what we had forgotten. In short the whole of what it could do would be to show a connexion and correspondence between two series of facts which had become known to us

through totally different channels, one through consciousness, and one through external observation.

It is now a familiar fact that the nerves on which the perception of outward objects depends, are in every case different from those on which the voluntary motions of the body depend ; that we perceive through the instrumentality of one set of nerves, and exercise volition through the instrumentality of another.

This is extremely valuable knowledge, and is one of those discoveries which extend our views of the complicated machinery of the animal structure ; yet it sheds no light whatever on the mental state called perception, nor yet on the act of willing muscular movements ; nor does it in the least alter these operations of the intelligent and active being in whom they take place. Both of them are mental events or phenomena of consciousness, while the facts that one nerve is necessary for the sensation of touch, and a separate nerve for the voluntary act of stretching out the hand or bending the finger, have become known to us by the aid of external observation.

It may serve to illustrate this point, if I refer to the connexion between musical sounds and the vibrations of strings or of other forms of visible matter.

We know very completely that vibrations of a certain velocity produce certain musical notes. By shortening or lengthening the strings or other

sonorous bodies, and thereby occasioning quicker or slower vibrations, we can produce the precise notes we wish. It has been established by repeated observations, that there is thus a correspondence between one set of phenomena known to us through the eye, and another set known to us through the ear — between the visible vibrations of bodies and musical sounds. When we hear a certain note we can tell that it is produced by a certain number of vibrations in the sonorous body in a given time; and conversely, when we cause such vibrations we know that they will produce a certain musical note.

The connexion here is perfect, but the two sets of facts between which the connexion exists, are respectively in themselves of an entirely different character; and since they come to our knowledge through two different organs of sense, they might each be studied independently of the other.

It is manifest, in a word, that the two series of phenomena, although connected together as cause and effect, are as objects of knowledge essentially distinct, and in that capacity are not affected by each other. The most thorough acquaintance with musical sounds by a person blind from birth, might be attained without his being aware of the existence of corresponding vibrations in tangible substances (tangible vibrations being the only ones he could know); and should he become ultimately apprised of the latter, the knowledge of them would make no difference in the sounds he heard, or in his sense

of melody and harmony, the laws of which (it may be added) would be unaffected to his apprehension by the discovery of an intimately connected and corresponding set of facts through another sense.

In the same way a deaf mute might become acquainted with many things concerning one set of the facts, while entirely cut off from a knowledge of the other ; as for example, with the connexion between the lengths of strings (under certain conditions of weight and tension), and the number of vibrations in a given time, together with the various figures into which a freely moving body, such as sand, is thrown by vibrations of various velocities : and all this of course, without the slightest conception of sound.

Moreover, should he be afterwards restored to hearing, or more properly, should the impediments to that sense be removed, this knowledge of vibrations would not be at all altered in its nature by his freshly acquired sensations (as they are usually termed), nor would the various notes pouring upon his ear, differ in the least from what they would have been heard to be, had he never been instructed in the mechanism of their causes.

The soul of music, if I may borrow a beautiful expression from the poets, the melody and harmony so delightful to man, and the laws of musical succession and combination, could not either in this or any other case, be susceptible of the slightest modification from the most thorough knowledge of the



mechanical means by which musical sounds are created ; although such knowledge would doubtless be serviceable to music as an art, and particularly in the construction of instruments. A man may be a great musician, without going beyond the mere rudiments of mechanical acoustics.

There is one way indeed in which a knowledge of such means might possibly have some influence, not on the perception but on the science of harmony ; namely, by directing attention to certain movements the effects of which on the sounds produced might be otherwise passed over. This direction of the attention seems to be the only way in which one sense can be said to assist any of the rest ; or, to express it differently, in which a series of facts known to us through one organ of sense can influence our knowledge of a connected and corresponding series of facts known to us through another.

It would not perhaps have been found out that two sonorous vibrations reaching the ear at the same time would under certain conditions neutralise each other and result in silence, unless it had been previously shown that two undulations of a liquid so encountering each other are mutually destructive. In a parallel case, the production of a dark spot in an illuminated space by the interference of two rays of light, might not have been discovered but for the same analogy, and had not the undulatory theory, proceeding on the analogy, pointed it out

as a phenomenon which on that theory must take place.\*

To apply these remarks on sound to the subject in hand : the operations and affections of which we are conscious form as much a separate sphere of observation as musical sounds must be admitted to do, and are equally distinct as objects of knowledge from the mechanical or physical means by which they are generated or influenced.

What are styled the phenomena of perception, of

\* "Supposing the light of any given colour to consist of undulations, of a given breadth, or of a given frequency, it follows that these undulations must be liable to those effects which we have already examined in the case of the waves of water, and the pulses of sound. It has been shown that two equal series of waves, proceeding from centres near each other, may be seen to destroy each other's effects at certain points and at other points to redouble them; and the beating of two sounds has been explained from a similar interference. We are now to apply the same principles to the alternate union and extinction of colours."—*A Course of Lectures on Natural Philosophy*, by Thomas Young, M. D., vol. i. p. 464, 4to. ed.

Speaking of this doctrine of the interference of light, Sir John Herschel styles it "the elegant, simple, and comprehensive theory of Young, — a theory which, if not founded in nature, is certainly one of the happiest fictions that the genius of man has yet invented to group together natural phenomena, as well as the most fortunate in the unexpected support it has received from all classes of new phenomena, which at their first discovery, seemed in irreconcilable opposition to it: it is in fact, with all its applications and details, a succession of *felicities*, insomuch that we may be almost induced to say, if it be not true, it deserves to be so."—*Optics, Encyc. Metrop.* See Life, by Dr. Peacock, p. 140. Dr. Young is one of those great men to whom their country has never done justice.

recollection, of the association of ideas, of reasoning, of willing, of the sensations and emotions, may be granted to be, in all likelihood, as intimately connected with conditions and movements in our physical frame, as musical sounds are with the vibrations of strings and other sonorous bodies: nevertheless, not only are they internal events, modes of consciousness, but they have laws and relations among themselves which are known to us quite independently of any observation of material phenomena, and of which the latter could never convey to us the faintest notion; just as melody and harmony are felt and the laws relating to them are gathered, independently of observing the tangible and visible vibrations of which musical sounds are the effects.

Now these internal laws and relations must ever constitute the principal subject of mental philosophy, in the same way as the laws and relations of musical sounds must ever form the chief subject of the science of harmony: and it appears to me as little reasonable to contend that the mind should never be investigated except in connexion with the study of the bodily organisation, as that music should never be methodically pursued except in connexion with the scientific study of the mechanical vibrations of sonorous bodies.\*

\* "We should very much mistake the matter, should we suppose that from the consideration of these proportions [in musical strings] we should be able to deduce the rules that are to guide the musician in the use of musical intervals. Such an

There are, however, manifest differences between the two classes of phenomena here compared, which are likely for an indefinite period, if not indeed for ever, to prevent the analogy between the cases from being complete or even approaching to it.

In the case of vibrations and musical sounds, it will be observed, we have two easily and well ascertained series of facts completely corresponding with each other, so that from any fact in one series we may infer the other. We can infer the note from the vibrations, and conversely, the vibrations from the note. The facts are conspicuously open to observation, and the connexion between the two is perfectly established.\*

But in the case of bodily and mental phenomena the requisite investigations are difficult, and the knowledge hitherto attained of the connexion between them is exceedingly, partial, slight, and imperfect.† There are a thousand mental states and attempt has been frequently made, but has always proved abortive. Speculative inquirers may please themselves [by finding a physical cause of the pleasure given to the ear by certain combinations in the coincidences of their vibrations, but they could never derive from such speculations one practical rule to guide the composer."—*Edinburgh Encyclopædia*, vol. xv. p. 50.

\* To show the precision of the knowledge which has been attained on this subject, it may be stated, in the words of Dr. Peacock, that "the pulses of air which produce the key-note C of the natural scale of music, form an undulation whose breadth is about 212 inches, and of which 64 are propagated in a second of time."

† The author of "Psychological Inquiries," one of the most

movements or modifications of consciousness, occurring every day and every hour, which we conjecture in a general way are somehow or other dependent on physical movements in the organisation, but we are unable except in a very slight degree, in a vague manner, and in a comparatively few instances, to determine the precise change whether of composition or interior arrangement in the tissue, or relative position to other parts, which precedes or follows any mental affection.

We may, perhaps, ascertain occasionally the physical seat of the movement, or the part of the body affected, but seldom the nature of the movement or affection. To this day it remains undetermined not only how the nerves move, but whether they have a motion of their own, or are only the lines traversed by a subtle fluid, ether, or other indescribable agent.

Nor is there, to speak in very moderate terms, any reasonable prospect that the most wonderful success in physiological research will ever issue in the establishment of a correspondence and connexion between the play of matter in the organisation on the one hand and affections of the mind on the other, at all approaching to that which subsists between vibrations and musical sounds.

And even if, in contravention of all probability,

recent works on the subject, admits that little has been done towards connecting physical organisation and mental phenomena with each other. See p. 172.

it should so issue, highly valuable as the acquisition would be, no change would be thereby effected in the phenomena of consciousness, or in our knowledge of the resemblances, successions, and other relations, to be observed amongst them.

These would remain as little altered, as melody and harmony, and the laws which govern them, and our knowledge of those laws, have been by all that has been accomplished in the science of mechanical acoustics.

## LETTER XVII.

PHRENOLOGY IN RELATION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
THE HUMAN MIND.

HAVING in my last letter endeavoured to show the relative position in which mental philosophy and material physiology stand to each other, I purpose next to inquire into the relation between the former, or the science of consciousness, and phrenology ; and how far the views already propounded apply to the particular phase of the subject presented by the latter.

It is not necessary for my purpose to profess either belief or disbelief in the doctrines of the system I am about to consider.

Assuming for argument's sake that certain portions of the brain are severally connected with certain propensities, certain kinds of emotion, and the operations of the mind about certain subjects, I proceed to examine what bearing the discovery of this connexion can have on the philosophy of consciousness, premising that it is immaterial, in the proposed investigation, whether the phrenological organs are taken to be few or numerous.

In the first place it may be observed, that all the arguments already employed to show that, however sedulously and successfully we may study the phe-

nomena of mind and of body in connexion with each other, they will ever remain perfectly distinct objects of knowledge, manifesting themselves to us through different channels, will apply to the subject to be considered.

As even the movements we may be able to trace in the parts or tissues of the body, can throw no light on what the operations of the mind with which they are found to be connected are, it follows, *a fortiori*, that the motionless tissue, or the mere form or size or relative position of any part, however intimately it may be associated with the phenomena of consciousness, is incapable of doing it. And in phrenology, as commonly studied and explained, there are no perceptible physical movements to be connected with mental events, but only a set of unmoving forms, as subjects of observation for that purpose.

But leaving this general ground, let us turn to the particular aspect of the investigation before us.

The subject will perhaps be best approached by selecting for examination a single phrenological organ. I will take that of cautiousness, and assume it to be an established fact, that a person who has a cranium exhibiting a large development of that organ is proportionately, or at least in a high degree, timorous, or easily frightened.

At the outset it may be admitted that the connexion thus shown to exist between the size of a certain part of the skull, and an excessive manifes-



tation of fear, might be usefully employed in aiding us to regulate our intercourse with our fellow-men, to select individuals for particular offices, to choose professions for young people, to shape appropriately our instructions and discipline in the education of children; and, in a word, to appreciate the character of both ourselves and others.

These are, doubtless, exceedingly useful results in matters collaterally related to mental philosophy; but it is plain that the connexion between the emotion and the particular conformation of the skull or brain, although it may thus be serviceable as an indication of character, does not enlighten us at all as to the nature of the feeling, its various modifications, the circumstances which generate, foment, prolong, and allay it, the conduct to which it leads, how it affects other states of consciousness, such as reasoning and imagination, and is affected by them, nor yet how it operates on the nerves and other tissues of the body. All these things—what the emotion is, its distinctive peculiarities, how it arises, subsides, and departs, and its moral and physical results—must be gathered from our own conscious experience, assisted as to some of the particulars mentioned by external observation directed to the conduct of others, as well as to physiological phenomena. It is knowledge which never could be gained by measuring or manipulating or scrutinising the cranium, or anatomising the brain. The fact of the connexion may throw light on a man's character

as to the possession of cautiousness or the want of it, as to his constitutional susceptibility to the class of feelings allied to it, or implied in it; but none as to the nature of the quality or the feelings. The philosophy of fear, an emotion which has played so important a part in government, in social conduct, and especially in religious inculcation, since the first records of the human race, and the effects of which, when excited for moral purposes, are as yet very imperfectly understood, would not be advanced by it a single step. The whole of the assistance rendered by the establishment of the connexion in question, resolves itself, I repeat, both in this and all other instances, into the circumstance of enabling us from an external physical indication to form a rough estimate of the probable degree in which the mental characteristic indicated is naturally possessed.

It may be added that the establishment of the organ of cautiousness, as it is styled, serves to corroborate most completely the previously ascertained fact, that timidity is not the product of external circumstances, but a constitutional quality, varying in intensity and excitability in different individuals; and it serves also to show the futility of expecting that an appeal to it for any purpose will have a uniform result in all cases.

What has been here said of the organ of cautiousness is true *mutatis mutandis* of all the rest.

Let us take as another illustration the faculty of

Wit. From the circumstance that witty men—individuals who possess an extraordinary facility in forming ingenious and unobvious combinations of ideas—have a particular part of the brain largely developed, we may anticipate a rich intellectual treat when we are fortunate enough to meet with them; but from such a development we can tell absolutely nothing of the nature of wit or its essential characteristics, of what constitutes its charm, of its various kinds, of its difference from humour, of the incidents which tend to heighten or abate its effects, of the intellectual habits and discipline favourable to it, and of its influence on the conduct of the man who is endowed with so brilliant a gift.\* On all these points the phrenologist possesses no advantage whatever over an ordinary inquirer who knows nothing of the cranium and its organs.

What then in this instance is our amount of gain from the science? Simply the fact that the capacity for wit has some inexplicable connexion with a part of the forehead, and that where the part in question is largely developed, an exuberant manifestation of it may be expected. It is scarcely needful to add that the superficial appearance of the organ, which is all that is accessible during life, yields not the slightest perceptible indication whether it is in repose or activity.

\* The reader who feels interested in the subject may find most of these topics elucidated in "The Theory of Wit" by the present author, in his volume of Discourses Literary and Philosophical.

On the most favourable view of the whole matter, the utmost which can be said on the side of phrenology is, that it presents us with an assemblage of organs indicating, to a limited extent and in a manner more or less vague and indeterminate, the mental qualities of their possessor; but as to what these qualities are (which is purely an affair of consciousness), the organs themselves can obviously give us no information whatever. The latter are simply outward physical signs, empirically established, of inward mental characteristics.

Our knowledge of the so-called faculties, feelings, and propensities, is primarily constituted by the recollection of the various states of consciousness through which we have passed, combined in some instances with our observation of the conduct of others; and these mental states we arrange and classify under convenient names. It is only after they are known and classified that it is possible to connect them empirically with any external appearances as indications of their being possessed, and these external indications, although they may be established by the most indubitable proofs, cannot in any way modify or add to our knowledge of those things which they indicate.\*

\* In the ablest essay on Phrenology which I had ever the good fortune to meet with, there is a passage so consonant with the views in the text, that I am tempted to subjoin it: "Whatever," says the writer, "may be the defects or absurdities of the mental or moral philosophy which *phrenologists* teach, we will avouch *phrenology* itself to be wholly innocent. It is

This description of phrenology undoubtedly circumscribes its province within very narrow bounds, and is widely at variance with the views of those philosophers who regard it as presenting us with a tolerably complete philosophy of mind.

I can imagine an advocate of it arguing in the following manner:—

“By a long series of observations we establish that certain developments of the brain indicate severally certain propensities, sentiments, and faculties. When this is done we take these propensities, sentiments, and faculties, as the material of our science, and trace the ways in which they manifest themselves and the laws which they follow. Now it is plain that inasmuch as the connexion of every one of these mental affections or phenomena with a particular portion of the brain or cranium was, in the course of the before-mentioned investigation, separately and independently established, they must, taken together, form a set of moral and intellectual characteristics true in themselves and susceptible of being classed according to their resemblances.

powerless alike for good or evil. It cannot go an inch beyond its first principles: those principles can only assert the correspondence between one set of facts and another set of facts; and one of these sets of facts can only be ascertained by means—those of observation and consciousness—to which the phrenological method of philosophizing is always characterized as *opposed*.”—*Edinburgh Review*, No. 150, art. *Phrenological Ethics*.

“Thus without any premeditated plan or theoretical assumption at the outset, we arrive by a patient observation of facts at a multiplicity of sentiments, propensities, and faculties in connexion with the exterior forms of the cranium, presenting in themselves if not a complete congeries of mental phenomena, yet a fair approach to it ; and a methodical exposition of the results so attained may justly claim to be styled a philosophy of the human mind.”

In looking at this argument, which I have endeavoured to put in its most forcible form, it must be admitted that whatever mental qualities or characteristics have been proved to be indicated in human beings, must be possessed, and so far form a part of the material of mental philosophy.

But it is also true that all which there is in this proceeding peculiar to phrenology is connecting them with certain forms or developments in the cranium.

The moral and intellectual phenomena themselves have not been brought to light by the establishment of the connexion, but are presupposed by it; and would have been just the same as objects of knowledge, and been susceptible of the same discrimination and arrangement, had the connexion never been established or imagined.

Showing that certain forms indicate certain characteristics, supposing it to be perfectly accomplished, discovers nothing new in what is indicated ;

and the whole of the facts relating to the human mind and character, adduced by the phrenologist, are such as are open in common to every speculator in human nature, and such as must be learned by every one in the same way, whether he is cognizant or ignorant of the part played by the brain.

In accordance with the preceding representation it will be manifest to the careful inquirer that phrenological disquisitions are for the most part, when they are well founded, made up of either facts of consciousness or facts of observation, which might have been collected without the knowledge of a single cerebral organ. Of this remark I shall take occasion in a subsequent letter to furnish abundant elucidations.

What is peculiar to phrenology, I repeat, is simply the establishment of the connexion between certain cranial forms or developments and certain mental characteristics.

It is true in this and in other instances, as already pointed out, where two sets of facts resting on independent evidence, or known through different channels, are shown to be connected as causes and effects, or concomitant phenomena, that facts belonging to one set may be highly serviceable in stimulating inquiry and in directing attention to facts belonging to the other, which might have else escaped observation, or not have been so promptly noticed.

The endeavour to establish a connexion between cranial developments and mental characteristics, has undoubtedly been serviceable, not only in raising the importance of the nervous structure as an object of investigation, but in bringing to light many curious facts in human nature; and in collecting a great number and variety of grounds for concluding that there are original differences, frequently of an extraordinary kind, in the constitutional qualities of individuals and races.

Although it is true that all these facts might have been observed without reference to the brain, or its configuration, or its exterior covering, still to phrenology as actually prosecuted must be awarded the merit of strongly directing general attention to many of them; and also of hastening, confirming, and disseminating views regarding the constitution of human nature which, notwithstanding they were once warmly contested, and are yet not universally received, the philosophical observer, without such assistance, would doubtless have finally reached.

A century or half a century ago, it seems to have been a prevailing notion that men are not naturally adapted by mental constitution to one pursuit more than to another; but that when any such peculiar aptitude is evinced, it is due to the direction given to the mind by casual events or surrounding circumstances. In unison with this view, it was expressly maintained by Dr. Johnson, in a well-known passage, that the true genius is a



mind of large general powers accidentally determined to a particular direction.\*

Phrenology, while failing in its more ambitious attempts, has greatly assisted in dissipating such erroneous views of human nature, and by the instances which, partly in the mistaken estimate of its own proper scope, it has industriously brought together, of extraordinary aptitude for music, mechanical invention, calculation, language-learning, and other pursuits, as well as of peculiar proneness to certain emotions and sentiments, it has widely spread the conviction that there is an infinite variety in the degree and combination of constitutional qualities by which men are adapted to as great a variety of functions and fortunes.

\* The passage occurs in the "Life of Cowley:"—"In the window of his mother's apartment lay Spenser's 'Fairy Queen,' in which he very early took delight to read; till, by feeling the charms of verse, he became, as he relates, irrevocably a poet. Such are the accidents which, sometimes remembered, and perhaps sometimes forgotten, produce that particular designation of mind, or propensity to some certain science or employment, which is commonly called Genius. The true Genius is a mind of large general powers, accidentally determined to some particular direction. Sir Joshua Reynolds, the great painter of the present age, had the first fondness for his art excited by the perusal of Richardson's treatise."—*Lives of the Poets*.

## LETTER XVIII.

## THE PHRENOLOGICAL ORGANS CONSIDERED AS INDICATIONS OF MENTAL CHARACTERISTICS.

It is sufficiently apparent from the preceding exposition that if phrenology has any value at all, it must mainly, if not wholly, consist in furnishing a series of physical facts corresponding to a series of mental facts, so that one shall indicate the other.

This it has in a measure accomplished by establishing (according to the hypothesis I have assumed) that certain cranial developments indicate certain moral and intellectual characteristics. But there are several reasons why this business of indication is very imperfectly done, and exceedingly limited in its scope: and why, notwithstanding the pretensions of phrenologists, it cannot be either minute or precise. Where two series of facts are perfect indications of each other it is obvious that both must be known in detail; that the facts of each series must be susceptible of precise ascertainment and exact definition, and that each particular fact or set of facts in one series must indicate a

particular fact or set of facts in the other. Such are the two series of facts in the mechanical department of acoustics and in music, to which I have adverted in a former letter: one is a perfect or rather set of perfect indications of the other. The vibrations are definite; the notes which they produce are equally so; and every kind of vibration is paired with a particular note.

In phrenology, on the contrary, the two series of facts presented to us as conjoined are defective in definiteness and in particular correspondence: the organs indicating, and the faculties and feelings or mental phenomena alleged to be indicated, are alike indeterminate: or at least there is an absence of easily discernible limits in both, and of correspondence in detail between the two.

With regard to the cerebral organs, there are confessedly no definite lines or divisions in the cranium or in the brain, to mark out one from another, to determine where one ends and another begins. Nor, if this difficulty were surmounted, or of no practical moment, are there any discoverable conditions or movements in the organs corresponding to the fine and complicated varieties of thinking and feeling and willing of which man is the subject; no perceptible physical states or changes answering to the diversified and intermingled and continually shifting phases of consciousness which it requires so much sagacity to reduce under definite heads. There is no parity in

point even of multifariousness, if we set aside the requirement of particular correspondence, between the indicating and the indicated facts.

In theory the phrenologist is bound to maintain that every mental change must be preceded or accompanied by a particular corresponding movement within the appropriate organ : but no such interior motions are in any way discoverable. They are wholly conjectural or inferential, nor is there the least clue to the kind of movements or (if you prefer the term) physical affections, which take place. Not only has the organ no definite external or even internal boundary, but when it may be presumed to be in the most intense action, it appears to the observer a mere motionless surface presenting no signs of the physical changes which are theoretically going on below, and of which, in their character of physical facts, the possessor of the organ is quite insensible.

Debarred from direct cognisance of cerebral movements, the only possible way in which the phrenologist can connect any of the various phenomena of consciousness with parts of the brain, is by first classifying such phenomena, or taking the classifications already made to his hands, and then finding out by repeated observation what particular classes (if any) are severally conjoined with the exterior developments of the cranium : which has been done or attempted by noting, in each case, what mental characteristic is largely manifested by

persons who have a given part of the cranium amply developed.

This is a perfectly legitimate and philosophical undertaking, but it is a much narrower, a more strictly limited, and a more difficult one than the advocates of the system under review appear to suppose. What I have just described is the utmost which can be achieved by it, viz. establishing that certain parts of the brain are connected in some unknown manner with certain kinds or classes of mental phenomena, and that by the size of the several parts an indication, more or less exact, is afforded of the degree in which the phenomena are manifested; or, to express it differently, of the degree in which the mental properties or characteristics exist. Although the legitimate end or aim of the science is thus by no means comprehensive, yet to reach even this moderate result requires both rare discrimination and a rigid adherence to rules, while the liability to error in the pursuit of it seems to be in proportion to the facility with which both discrimination and rules may be neglected and yet the semblance of methodical inquiry preserved.

I purpose then to consider, in the present letter, the limits which circumscribe the proper sphere of phrenology; or, to express myself differently, the principles which must in the nature of the case regulate the process of establishing the connexion between organs and mental phenomena, as well as



limit the indications of the phenomena by the organs; and likewise the errors which, from inattention to such principles, pervade phrenological speculations.

The remarks which I have to offer in the prosecution of this design, I will throw for the sake of clearness into several distinct propositions, to be afterwards more fully elucidated.

1. In order to establish an organ there must be a definite class of mental phenomena proved by appropriate evidence to be connected with it.

2. After the organ has been established, it cannot be assumed to indicate anything not comprehended in the class of mental phenomena with which it has been proved by evidence to be connected; and, reciprocally, nothing else can be assigned to it.

3. In proportion as the class of mental phenomena is general or comprehensive, the establishment of a corresponding organ by the requisite evidence will be difficult, and require multiplied observations, while the value of the organ as an indication will necessarily decrease, till it may be finally annihilated.

4. In the same proportion facilities and inducements will be multiplied for lapsing into the error, so predominant in phrenological speculations, of assigning operations to organs without evidence: whence the necessity of a rigorous adherence to rules 1 and 2.

5. A remarkable form of this predominant error

which is worth dwelling upon, occurs when the functions or provinces of two or more organs are so represented as to interfere with each other, rendering it necessary to resort to arbitrary lines of demarcation between them—in itself a suicidal *reductio ad absurdum*.

Such principles and observations as are here laid down might perhaps be advantageously multiplied, but the elucidation of the preceding five propositions will suffice to exhibit the proper scope and limits of the science, the difficulties incident to it, and the nature of the aberrations into which its followers have been betrayed.

1. The first proposition, that in order to establish an organ a definite class of mental phenomena must be proved to be connected with it, sounds like a truism, but what follows will show that to explain and enforce it is by no means needless. The class in question may be more or less general or comprehensive, but it must be definite, otherwise the organ will be an imperfect and useless indication. It is of course implied that *two* or more classes cannot be connected with the same organ, but were it possible or attempted, separate evidence would obviously be required for each.

The consequences of not attending to the plain and simple rule embodied in the first proposition, are seen in the strange and unscientific jumble of mental phenomena frequently referred to one organ.

I will select an example from one of the most eminent phrenologists of the day.

"The faculty of ideality," says Mr. George Combe, "produces the feeling of exquisiteness and perfectibility, and delights in the *beau-ideal*. The knowing and reflecting faculties perceive qualities as they exist in nature, but this faculty desires something more exquisitely lovely, perfect, and admirable than the scenes of reality. It tends to elevate and endow with splendid excellence every idea conceived by the mind; and stimulates the other faculties to imagine scenes and objects invested with the qualities which it delights to contemplate, rather than with the degree of perfection which Nature usually bestows. It is this faculty which inspires with exaggeration and enthusiasm, which prompts to embellishment and splendid conceptions." \*

Mark the number of things which a single faculty or organ is here represented as doing: it produces feelings, and itself experiences delight; it also desires what is preternaturally exquisite, as well as rejoices: further, it endows all ideas with splendid excellence; it stimulates other faculties to exercise their imaginations; it inspires with exaggeration and enthusiasm, and it prompts to embellishments and brilliant conceptions.

In this crowd of operations, real and fictitious, huddled together without congruity, you seek in

\* Elements of Phrenology, p. 75. Third edition.



vain for any principle of classification ; the author could not have had any distinct class in his mind, and it is difficult to surmise what sort of evidence he fancied he had to prove that these various mental phenomena (many of them wholly imaginary) are alike the results of movements in the organ of ideality. He seems not to have been at all aware that for the assignment to the organ of every different kind of operation described, separate grounds are indispensably required. For instance, assuming it to have been indisputably established that ideality "delights in the *beau-ideal*," we cannot fail to see that distinct evidence must be adduced to show that it also performs the very dissimilar function of "inspiring with enthusiasm."

2. We shall now be prepared to take up the second proposition. After the phrenologist has legitimately established the connexion between the organ and the class of mental phenomena, he is manifestly precluded from assuming the organ to indicate anything not comprehended in the class. The evidence being such as to establish a connexion between the cranial development and a definite kind of mental phenomena, and nothing beyond, the subsequent introduction of any other mental phenomenon must by the supposition be without evidence, and would arbitrarily unsettle the classification.

It would be of no avail to urge that the phenomenon so introduced is closely allied to the others or consequent upon them.

If anything not belonging to the class as established were allowed to be included, it would necessarily be brought in without any grounds for it, or the original classification would be wrong.

The point here insisted upon may be elucidated by referring to the organ of cautiousness, or more properly, of fear, which has been established on the ground that men very much subject to that passion, have the part of the cranium so denominated largely developed.

Let us see then how far this fact can carry us.

A man who is suffering under the passion of fear is not only possessed with it, and percipient of what excites it, but is at the same time conscious of other affections : he perhaps conceives, remembers, reasons, exaggerates appearances, imagines unreal objects, takes precautions, adopts means of evasion or flight from the apprehended evil, or resolves in the very excess of his alarm to contend manfully with it.

Of all these various operations and affections the phrenologist cannot, according to the principle laid down, refer any one to the organ but the emotion of fear itself. His sole evidence of the connexion between the mental phenomena and the organ being that in persons who have the feeling in excess, the organ is large, nothing more can be inferred in the hypothetical case before us than that during the excitement of the feeling of fear the organ is in activity. He cannot include in this activity any

concomitant or consequent mental incidents how closely soever they may be allied. And reciprocally, as he cannot refer such incidents to the organ, the organ cannot indicate the incidents : it can indicate nothing but emotions of fear, or rather liability to such emotions.

Some light may be thrown on the question before us by referring to a difference between the founder of the science, Dr. Gall, and other phrenologists in relation to this very organ — a difference which is singularly instructive as to the difficulties to be encountered and conditions to be observed in connecting an organ with mental phenomena. He attributes to the organ not only the emotion of fear but the intellectual properties of circumspection and foresight ; while Dr. Spurzheim more sagely, but in language at which it is difficult not to smile, declares his belief that it does not “foresee,” but on the contrary “is blind,” and “without reflection.”

Surely since the organ is recorded as “established,” there ought to be no doubt or controversy about what it indicates. If the process of establishing it, briefly expressed, was “large organ, much fear,” nothing but that passion can be referred to it. Should it be contended that the evidence adduced by Dr. Gall goes to prove that circumspection and foresight ought to be included in the functions of the organ, the defence, if admitted, would indeed free him from the charge of having overstepped the limits prescribed by the assumed evi-

dence, but it would involve him in the difficulties and disadvantages consequent upon comprehensiveness and even incongruity of classification to be considered under my next proposition.

Meanwhile all that it is here needful to maintain on this point is, that the phrenologist when he has finally formed his class must, in the nature of the case and in logical consistency, abide by it. If in the course of investigation he discovers that he has made his class too narrow as, in the opinion of succeeding inquirers, Dr. Gall did by limiting the organ of Acquisitiveness to theft, and that of Destructiveness to murder, let him widen it; but after having rectified all errors he must at last come to a definite class more or less comprehensive, the limits of which he cannot be allowed to exceed in his subsequent expositions or dissertations.

We must not confound the liberty of altering a class on the acquisition of new evidence, with the irregular or surreptitious introduction without evidence of something not belonging to the class.

An example of the irregularity is furnished by Mr. Combe in treating of the aforesaid Destructiveness, the organ which is attended by the impulse and desire to destroy, and is greatly developed in carnivorous animals as well as in human beings who hunt them. We have here something definite, and there is no reason, as far as I know, to question the facts. But the author goes on to tell us that "it [the organ] is essential to satire; and inspires

authors who write cuttingly with a view to lacerate the feelings of their opponents" \* — a gratuitous introduction of what would require a large amount of separate evidence to substantiate it. Mr. Combe's leap from a lion to a satirist (lions suggest leaps even when they do not make them) is a leap in the dark, although he contrives to look at the hunters' heads by the way.

3. The third proposition is, that in proportion as the class of mental phenomena is comprehensive, the difficulty of establishing the connexion with the organ by the requisite evidence is augmented, while the value of the organ in its character of an indication necessarily decreases.

This remark applies with additional force to those numerous cases in which what is said to be indicated by the organ consists in fact of heterogeneous mental phenomena forming several distinct kinds or classes, and scarcely reducible under the widest denomination.

To elucidate the proposition before us, I cannot do better than to take up again the instance of Dr. Gall's classification last cited.

Suppose that instead of regarding what is usually termed the organ of Cautiousness as simply indicating the passion of Fear, any one tried to prove, in accordance with Dr. Gall, that it indicates likewise Circumspection and Foresight, he would have to

\* Elements of Phrenology, p. 39.

show, in order to make the indication of any value, that these three different qualities always accompany each other, as well as that they are always accompanied, when remarkable, by a large development of the cranial organ.

The classification or rather collocation, in any way, of mental phenomena so different under one head, would be bad simply as a psychological arrangement, inasmuch as there is (to express myself in popular language) the foresight of hope, of love, of ambition, as well as that of fear; and there is the circumspection of wisdom contemplating all things in the circle of its resources as means to the highest ends, and the circumspection of self-interest quietly looking about for every opportunity of aggrandisement, as well as that of alarm casting around it a hurried glance at the outlets for escape from the dreaded object.

But, what is more important, fear is an emotion, while foresight, although it may be attended by an emotion or result from it, is an intellectual act or combination of intellectual acts. The two are heterogeneous and disparate, and bear no sort of regular proportion to each other; nor can they well be brought under a less general description than that of "modes or phenomena of consciousness." The same remarks are of course applicable in the case of circumspection.

For the reasons here given it may be pronounced impossible, to all appearance at least, that these

several mental phenomena can be proved to be the consequences of movements in the same organ ; it would require at all events the evidence of three separate trains of very numerous and well sifted facts ; but supposing the apparent impossibility to be overcome by some inconceivable means, the indication subsequently afforded by the organ would be extremely vague and therefore comparatively worthless. Should you happen to meet with a person endowed with a large development of the organ in question, you would be altogether perplexed what distinctive conclusion to draw as to the qualities indicated : you would be utterly at a loss to tell whether he was very timid, very circumspect, or possessed of great foresight. Your safest inference would doubtless be that the qualities appertained to him in equal measure, but even this cautious conclusion would not be borne out by uniform experience. It is well known that the Duke of Wellington, whose courage was unquestionable, and who was certainly not subject beyond his fellow-soldiers to needless or easily excited alarm, was one of the most circumspect generals that ever conducted a campaign or fought a battle ; and his foresight reached to the minutest as well as the most comprehensive arrangements needful to carry out his purposes. In respect of these latter qualities he ought to have had the organ large ; in respect of fear, he ought to have had it small. Such indications of dissimilar qualities consequently, could they even

be established, which they cannot be, would prove of little or no value in any case, and in most cases would mislead.

4. The fourth proposition flows naturally from the third. In proportion as the class is comprehensive it affords facilities for assigning, or rather it leads irresistibly to the practice of assigning, mental phenomena to the organ arbitrarily, or without evidence.

Perhaps no instance can illustrate this position better than the speculations of phrenologists about the organ which they name Individuality. Its function is very comprehensive; it seems to be simply Observation, but is described phrenologically to be "knowing things as mere existences," the precise meaning of which I leave to your sagacity to discover. Such a wide definition presents a fine field to men who are not bound down to evidence, and they accordingly take the opportunity of freely roaming over it.

The faculty of Individuality (say the phrenologists) renders us observant of objects which exist; gives the notion of substance; forms the class of ideas represented by substantive nouns when used without an adjective; gives the desire accompanied with the ability to know objects as mere existences, without regard to their modes of action; it prompts to observation; it is a great element in a genius for natural history; it assists imitation in promoting mimicry; it enables the artist to give body



and substance to the conceptions of his other faculties; it gives the tendency to personify notions and phenomena, or to ascribe existence to mere abstractions of the mind, such as Ignorance, Folly, or Wisdom; and it does many other things. Such is the account, abridged but not misrepresented, which is given by Mr. Combe.\*

Now you must recollect that the phrenologist here virtually makes the astounding assertion that physical movements take place in the organ of Individuality corresponding to all these diversified mental incidents. Conceive the amount of evidence, the separate chains of facts required for the scientific establishment of such a position; and then turn to the narrow ground on which the whole is apparently made to rest, viz. the alleged fact that persons who have the part of the cranium referred to largely developed are remarkable for large powers of observation, or (to keep to phrenological language) for great aptness at "knowing things as mere existences:" — in itself, by the way, a sort of knowledge which I for one have never been able to attain or even conceive.

I should like to see this evidence, or, if I have understated it, any other which can be adduced, the stronger the better, brought to bear in support of some of the preceding assertions, especially the positions, laid down with such remarkable punc-

\* System of Phrenology, 4th edit. p. 463.

tiliousness, that Individuality forms the class of ideas represented by substantive nouns when used without an adjective; and that it assists Imitation in promoting mimicry.

It seems as if, in such cases as these, the phrenologists, taking the general function of the organ, which alone they can prove (*e. g.* observation in the above instance), set themselves to imagine what a man endowed with such an organ would be likely to think, feel, and do, and then forthwith put down these his hypothetical or imaginary deeds as the functions of the organ.

5. Passing to my next division, I come to the consideration of another form of the attribution of functions without evidence. It occurs when two or more organs are so represented as to clash with each other in the functions assigned to them, whence it becomes necessary for the phrenologist to draw arbitrary boundaries between their several provinces; a necessity which bespeaks that he is already deep in error, and which amounts, as I have said, to a self-inflicted *reductio ad absurdum*.

To explain what I mean, it will be requisite to take a rapid glance at the phrenological organs from my own point of view.

What I have already, for the convenience of brief reference, called their functions, or in other words the mental operations and affections assigned to them, may, for the convenience of the present exposition, be arranged as follows :

1. Simple feelings, such as benevolence, firmness, veneration, &c. &c.

2. Feelings having specific directions, such as amativeness, philoprogenitiveness, &c.

3. Specific intellectual operations about various things, as comparison, individuality, &c.

4. Various intellectual operations about specific things, as tune, colour, form, language, &c.

In the case of the two first divisions there is not much room for the defect of which I am treating. Here the phrenologist may have little difficulty in establishing an organ, and has chiefly to guard afterwards against ascribing to it anything but feelings of the appropriate and peculiar kind. He is not very likely, even in his most random explanations, to be led into making the organs or their functions clash, although it is quite possible to do so. But when we come to the so-called knowing and reflecting organs, and find that the function of one organ is represented as consisting in a specific intellectual operation about various subjects, and the function of another organ as consisting in various intellectual operations about a specific subject, we cannot fail to see a source of collision and confusion.

The phrenologist in dealing with them cannot help involving himself in embarrassment; he is obliged either to assign to the organs what may be called cross-processes — to make them, in fact, play at cross-purposes — or to draw quite arbitrary lines of demarcation between their respective functions.

The point in question is pretty well illustrated by the phrenological treatment of the organ of comparison. In ordinary philosophy to compare objects is simply to discern their resemblances and differences, and although other mental operations may be going on at the same time in connexion with it, the process itself, to whatever objects it may be directed, whether sights or sounds or tastes, or lines or angles, or actions or passions, is generically the same. If it were not, it would scarcely have received in all these cases the same appellation.

Mark, however, what the phrenologist teaches :

“The faculty [Comparison] gives the power of perceiving resemblances and analogies. Tune may compare different notes ; Colouring contrast different shades ; but Comparison may compare a tint and a note, a form and a colour, which the other faculties by themselves could not accomplish. ‘The great aim of this faculty,’ says Dr. Spurzheim, ‘seems to be to form abstract ideas, generalisations, and to establish harmony among the operations of the other faculties. Colouring compares colours with each other and feels their harmony, but Comparison adapts the colours to the object which is represented ; it will reject lively colours to present a gloomy scene. The laws of music are particular, and Tune compares tones ; but Comparison chooses the music according to the situations where it is executed. It blames dancing music in a church ; it is opposed to walking with

fine clothes in the dirt ; to superb furniture beside common things ; it feels the relation between the inferior and superior feelings, and gives the preference to the latter. Its influence, however, presupposes the activity of the other faculties, and it cannot act upon them if they are inactive. This explains why some persons have taste and good judgment in one respect and not in another. He who is deprived of Reverence may not be careful enough about its application. He may deride what others respect. But if another possess it in a high degree and at the same time Comparison, he will wish to bring his Reverence into harmony with his other powers.' Comparison thus takes the widest range of nature within its sphere." \*

Can any thing, by the way, be more positive and precise and minute than this assignment of special functions, this distribution of distinct offices ?

How clearly and unhesitatingly everything is laid down !

We seem to see the faculties at work as plainly as bees in a glass hive.

The multiplicity of duties falling to Comparison is indeed somewhat astounding — forming abstract ideas, establishing harmony amongst its neighbours, adapting and rejecting colours, choosing one sort of music and blaming another, opposing perambulations and fine furniture, feeling relations and show-

\* A System of Phrenology, by George Combe, vol. ii. p. 565.

ing preferences. Just glance in passing (for it is not yet time to do more) at the mass of evidence requisite to substantiate such allegations.

But the circumstance for which I have cited the passage and which I particularly entreat you now to notice, is how the organs would be inevitably playing at cross purposes, or rather treading on each other's heels, unless they were prevented from doing so by the most arbitrary limitations of their respective functions. It is obvious that if Tune, Colour, Form, Language, Weight, and the rest, all compare their own proper objects as there represented, they must woefully interfere with the function of Comparison, and very often disagreeably jostle with it; in a word, they threaten to leave it nothing to do. Hence it becomes necessary to mark out its distinctive province, so as to preclude such interferences and collisions, and save it from imminent extinction; and it is certainly an admirably conservative expedient — a life-boat amidst the breakers — to allot to it the perception of resemblance between objects lying within the different spheres of the other organs, while each organ looks after resemblances between objects within its own special sphere.

So far all seems adroit and ingenious and plausible enough; but in order to appreciate it fully and fairly, we must come to the evidence on which it rests.

Harsh as it may seem to disturb such precise and

specious representations by asking for the grounds on which they proceed, it cannot be avoided: the spirit of modern inquiry is inexorable: the question must be put. What then are the facts that warrant this allotment of functions, this accumulation of offices assigned to comparison, and particularly, in connexion with the subject before us, this, at first sight, arbitrary limitation of provinces?

How, amongst other marvellous things, is it discovered that Colour (to adopt phrenological language) perceives and feels the harmony of crimson and green in a rose, but that it is Comparison which discerns the adaptation of the latter hue, in its utmost freshness, to symbolise the mental condition of a young man just entering the world in a tumult of high spirits and inexperience? or, in literal language, that there is in the first case a physical affection of the organ of Colour, in the second, a physical affection of the organ of Comparison?

In vain we turn to the cranial developments; they are mute, they tell us nothing in such a case. If we turn to consciousness we are no better off. Not being conscious of the organs at all, we cannot be conscious of the part which each of them plays, or how the business is partitioned amongst them; or, in other words, of the motions of which they are severally the seats.

In reference to what is ascribed to comparison, we may be conscious, I admit, of the various acts

and affections described ; of abstracting and generalising ; of discriminating what colour is adapted to a gloomy scene ; of blaming dancing-music in a church ; of feeling decidedly opposed to a walk with fine clothes in the dirt ; of discerning the incongruity of superb furniture in juxtaposition with common things ; and of preferring the loftier to the lower principles of human nature ; but of any movements in a particular organ of the brain, preceding all or any of these multifarious acts and varied emotions, we have no consciousness whatever. In a word, neither are we conscious of these cerebral movements, nor can we perceive them as external facts, nor can we infer from the mental phenomena described that they take place in one organ, or two, or twenty organs. As to the usual kind of phrenological proof, the large organ found in connexion with a powerful manifestation of the function, it is scarcely within the capacity of the human mind to conceive the possibility of bringing evidence of this description, which would establish that such different operations as forming abstract ideas, adapting colours to objects, blaming, opposing, preferring, are all the results of physical affections or movements in one and the same busy region of the brain. Independently of the clashing with other organs so fatal in itself, the evidence for these multifarious functions is a complete blank.

“ Well, but taking the general function we find ” (it may be said in reply) “ that men with inverted



pyramids in the upper part of the forehead are always prone to the use of similes and metaphors ; in short, to drawing comparisons in general. This is a fact which no reasoning can put down."\*

Be it so. I grant it. What then? Should we happen to fall in with persons carrying such a development in front, we may confidently look out for figures of speech when they open their lips, or take up a pen: just as when the barometer suddenly sinks at sea, we may look out for squalls. But how does this prove that while the frontal pyramid, in phrenological deference to Tune, takes no notice of the similarity of the sounds issuing from the various instruments of yonder military band, it reserves to itself the exclusive privilege of perceiving that the martial music and the gorgeous banners are alike adapted to inspire warlike ardour? Why should not Tune and Colour compare notes on the occasion? Why not unite to oppose the monopoly and claim as a joint-right the office, in which they are both interested, thus usurped by Comparison?

The survey which I have now taken is designed to show how greatly phrenologists have overrated the capabilities of their science even in its legitimate province; and how insensible they have been

\* Dr. Gall's description of the organ is, that it is an eminence of the form of a reversed pyramid, on the upper and middle portion of the frontal bone — typical, it may be presumed, of the slender basis on which many turgid comparisons rest.

to the difficulties in their way, and to the necessity of evidence at every step.

I have endeavoured to point out, by a somewhat minute examination of their doctrines and explanations, the errors into which they have fallen in ascribing functions to organs without any, or without adequate proof; and to bring into view the great truth which they have overlooked in their zeal, but to which they must ultimately come, that all which the phrenological organs can indicate is a proneness to some particular kind of feeling, or an aptitude for some particular kind of mental operation, or for some particular intellectual pursuit.

When the frontal pyramid (to take the last example cited) is established as the organ of comparison, what in reality does the fact amount to? Stripped of all hypothesis, it amounts simply to this, that the part of the forehead in question is connected in some unknown manner with discerning resemblances, and that the function will probably be manifested in proportion to the size of the organ. The same assertions may of course be applied *mutatis mutandis* to the other organs, and they comprise all that phrenology can teach. When seen in its true light and kept in its proper place, it is a species of knowledge which may be exceedingly useful, and is worthy of strenuous cultivation: but when, leaving the simple facts of such a connexion and of the limited indications afforded, it proceeds to allot various and often dis-

crepant functions to the same organs, and in a series or complication of mental actions, to distribute the several parts of the performance amongst them with all the particularity of a play-bill, the so-called science loses all pretension to that name, talks without evidence, and weaves a mere tissue of dreams.

You will probably have observed that in the preceding commentary, I have in general avoided using the term *faculties*, and spoken only of organs. I have done so purposely, because organs are, in truth, the only peculiar things belonging to phrenology.

To speak of *faculties* is the common and much abused practice of all philosophy, and I have shown, in the first series of these letters, that they are only fictitious entities assumed for the sake of readily conveying our meaning, but frequently leading us into serious error. On the other hand, *organs* are real things and form the sole peculiarity of the science before us, which has no mental phenomena exclusively belonging to it either as subjects of speculation or by right of discovery.

The shortest and most direct way of treating it is, consequently, to set aside the imaginary existences called faculties, and come at once to the connexion between the real mental phenomena and the physical organs. Accordingly, you will find that whenever a mental operation or affection has been assigned to a faculty, I have treated the

assignment as equivalent to asserting a physical affection or movement in the organ. To this the phrenologist cannot consistently object. If he did, I should be at a loss to conceive what ground of objection he could take.

The organic movement or affection is all in the way of event that is peculiar to his doctrine, and if in assigning a mental phenomenon to a faculty he refuses to be considered as affirming or implying the physical incident, he deserts his colours. If, for example, when he attributes a simile to the faculty of Comparison, or a smart saying to that of Wit, he disclaims any ulterior reference to the physical process — denies that his assertion implies an organic affection — then he is employing such language only in the same manner as any other writer may do ; there is nothing phrenological in what he enunciates. It is by the assertion either expressed or implied of a corresponding affection of the cerebral organ that the doctrine of the phrenologist is distinguished from all others, and to this he must be held.

## LETTER XIX.

PHRENOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF HISTORICAL AND  
FICTITIOUS CHARACTERS.

THE preceding letters have endeavoured to show what is the utmost that phrenology can do, on the supposition that the connexion asserted to exist between the developments of the brain and the possession of certain mental characteristics has, at least to a considerable extent, been established.

I have attempted to point out that, besides the establishment of the connexion itself, which I thus assume to be proved, and the assistance which it may lend in the appreciation and predication of personal character, this department of inquiry, as actually prosecuted, has been of service by directing the attention of the observer to facts of consciousness and of conduct otherwise likely to be for a while overlooked or less minutely investigated; but that it is, and must be, quite powerless to throw any light derived from exclusive sources on the nature of mental qualities and operations; that, even as furnishing indications of such qualities and operations, its sphere is exceedingly circumscribed;

that, when it oversteps its proper limits, it falls into inevitable error, and frequently assigns functions to organs, particularly in complicated mental events, either on inadequate grounds, or without any evidence at all.

It will be instructive to follow up and corroborate these conclusions, by examining some of those explanations of historical and even fictitious characters which make so conspicuous a figure in phrenological writings. The science claims to throw new light on the history of mankind, and especially to afford a deeper insight than is commonly obtained into the virtues and vices, the excellences and defects, of the eminent men who have at once benefited and dignified their race. Such large pretensions, although already virtually disproved, challenge an express and careful investigation.

Amongst other celebrated persons on whom the experiment of phrenological elucidation has been tried, I find our great lexicographer, Dr. Samuel Johnson, and I do not know that a better subject could be selected for the trial.

It is, perhaps, an advantage that the paper from which I shall quote was written by one who was considered in his day as an accomplished and successful expounder of the science, and was besides of fair repute in his profession, I mean Dr. Andrew Combe.

From a biographical article before him, Dr. Combe cites an account of Dr. Johnson's tendency to me-

lancholy; of the predominance of his fears of the Supreme Being over more cheerful views; of his constant apprehension of death; of his slavish adherence to the creed of the nursery; and of his horror at the slightest incredulity. Had the biographer been a phrenologist, says Dr. Combe, he would have added that these feelings arose out of large Cautiousness, Veneration, and Wonder.

He then goes on to give us information respecting these three sentiments. As to the first, an over-activity of Cautiousness produces distressing dread without adequate external causes; also doubts, hesitation, uneasiness, melancholy, and hypochondria. This "explains" the gloomy part of Dr. Johnson's character. Next as to Veneration. "It gives the feeling of respect" (in the language of Dr. Spurzheim) "and leads us to look upon some things as sacred; it venerates old age, and whatever is respectable, and it adores God." We are further told, that it predisposes to religious feeling, but does not judge what ought to be venerated.

"Besides the proof" (continues our author) "already afforded us of the activity of this feeling in the mind of Johnson, we are expressly told, that the tendency was so strong as to prevent him exercising his intellect in determining the objects of worship. His veneration for everything connected with religion was extraordinary." All this part of his character is "explained" by a large endowment of the organ appropriated to reverence. The writer

then proceeds to the third organ before mentioned, namely, Wonder.

"Nothing," he says, "has excited more astonishment in the minds of philosophers than that a man of Dr. Johnson's mighty intellect should have been so credulous and superstitious as to believe in supernatural agency, ghosts, second sight, lucky days, &c.; 'for,' says his biographer, 'though a jealous examiner of the evidence of ordinary facts, yet his weakness on the side of religion, or where anything *supernatural* was supposed to be concerned, rendered him willing to give credit to various notions with which superstition imposes upon the fears and the credulity of mankind.'" \* \* "But," continues our author, "phrenology again shows its superiority in the simplicity with which it explains this singular feature."

This simple explanation is that a large endowment of "Wonder" gives the tendency to seek and see the supernatural in everything, and to believe in inspirations, forewarnings, phantoms, demons, witchcraft, astrology, and such like.

Thus the melancholy, the gloomy apprehensions, the religious tendencies, the superstition, and the credulity of Dr. Johnson, are simply and satisfactorily "explained" in the view of the phrenologist by referring to the great development in him of Cautiousness, Veneration, and Wonder.

In all this, nevertheless, I am unable for my own part to see any explanation at all. It is substan-



tially no more than enunciating in a round about way, with the admixture of a few incongruities, two or three identical propositions; that his fears proceeded from his fearfulness; that his pious feelings sprang from his piety, and that his credulous conduct resulted from his credulity. It is for the most part putting into the phraseology of a system truisms, which, were it needful to utter them at all, might be equally well expressed in ordinary language. It obviously furnishes no information of any kind. What is said of his feelings and his conduct does not specify an emotion or an incident, a peculiarity of superstition, or an eccentricity of behaviour, which is contributed or pointed out by phrenology: they are all taken from the common accounts of his life, and referred in a somewhat rough and indiscriminating manner to the phrenological faculties and organs, without any special and independent evidence to warrant the attribution. Looking at this reference merely as a classification of mental characteristics, it is largely disfigured by those faults which almost always attend the creation of distinct faculties and the attempt to describe their spheres of action — incongruity, indefiniteness, and want of grounds for the distribution of the parts severally assigned to them.

In the instance before us, there is, you will not fail to observe, an odd heterogeneous mixture (similar to what I have pointed out in the preceding letter) of the actions and feelings attributed

to the so-called sentiments or their organs, a remarkable if not a ludicrous jumble. Thus Cautiousness engenders not only "distressing dread," but "melancholy" and "hypochondria:" Veneration "venerates whatever is respectable" and "adores God, but does not judge what ought to be venerated:" Wonder "gives the tendency to seek and see the supernatural in everything" and "to believe in phantoms, demons, and astrology," and "contributes to religious faith."

The whole of the "explanation" is surely lamentable, trifling in a really well informed and sensible writer, — making assertions without proof; allotting functions without either evidence or discrimination, and yet doing all with a happy unconsciousness of its nullity, and with the intrepidity of perfect intuition.

If an actual examination of the great lexicographer's head had been made, and the cranial organs of Cautiousness, Veneration, and Wonder, had been found to be large, something strictly belonging to phrenology would have been effected; but it would have amounted only to this, that the conformation of his skull showed he was constitutionally very much inclined to fear, to reverence, and to credulity: that the remarkable proneness to these sentiments or affections evinced in his life was the result of his organisation, and not to be ascribed in the main to the circumstances by which he had been surrounded and impressed: and even the

conclusion that these were in a high degree natural or complexional qualities of his mind, might have been inferred by any one well acquainted with his career, his conversation, and his writings, yet utterly ignorant of his cerebral organisation.

But instead of furnishing independent cranial evidence, to proceed, as the author on whom I am commenting has done, to take a man's character as portrayed in a biographical narrative without any proof of the actual conformation of his brain, and gravely tell us that certain gloomy moods resulted from his Cautiousness, certain religious traits were the consequences of his Veneration, and certain credulous acts were the fruits of his Wonder, plainly amounts to nothing but a transmutation of phrases. Considered as to the reasoning implied, it is moving in a circle. It is first deducing the possession of a faculty and its corresponding organ from the recorded conduct of the man, and then "explaining" his conduct by referring it to the faculty and organ previously deduced from it.

To sum up what I have said : when a phrenologist takes in hand the skull of any eminent character of past times and shows that its conformation indicates the qualities which the conduct of the individual actually exhibited, he is engaged in a rational and scientific proceeding ; but the whole of what he accomplishes is proving that such qualities had a constitutional ground or origin. What else they were, all their particular manifestations and

connexions, must be gathered from the biographical narrative.

When, on the other hand, without reference to the actual cranium, he merely attributes the sentiments and conduct of the individual to the phrenological faculties, he is doing nothing more than classifying the feelings, mental operations, and actions of the man under the peculiar terms of his own system. He cannot proceed a step beyond. I correct myself: there is a further achievement possible. Should he choose to amuse himself with drawing inferences from the qualities displayed to the organisation possessed, he may conjecture or conclude, without the possibility of being refuted, unless the actual skull should be subsequently produced, that the subject of his speculations had very probably a cranium of a particular conformation; that he had one organ full, another moderate, a third large, and a fourth small. But of what avail would such inferences be?

The sort of explanation of which I have attempted in the present letter to show the utter futility has been carried so far that the actions of Shakespeare's *dramatis personæ* have been elaborately "*explained on phrenological principles.*"

"They," says a writer in the 'Phrenological Journal,'\* "who have studied the subject, and who have consequently accustomed themselves to *think* phrenologically, are able in all cases of real cha-

\* Vol. i. p. 93.

acter, even the most anomalous, to discern the combination of powers and feelings (according to the phrenological system), which produce the manifestations perceived ; and *whenever a character is well or naturally described, either in real or fictitious writing, have no difficulty in applying to the delineation the same mode of analysis.* We who have experienced this in numberless instances, feel, in the occurrence of every new case, a confident expectation that it is capable of being explained satisfactorily on phrenological principles, and we are never disappointed. We can assure our readers that if they will only be persuaded to try the efficacy of this system as a medium of thought, they will find it to furnish a key to human character, and to afford an insight into human nature, of which, antecedently to actual experience, they could not have formed the remotest conception."

The writer then proceeds to what he calls an analysis of the character of Macbeth, and quotes for this purpose the following soliloquy from the third scene of the first act:—

" Two truths are told,  
As happy prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme. — I thank you, gentlemen. —  
This supernatural soliciting  
Cannot be ill ; cannot be good : — If ill,  
Why hath it given me earnest of success,  
Commencing in a truth ? I amthane of Cawdor :  
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,

And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings:  
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man, that function  
Is smother'd in surmise; and nothing is  
But what is not."

From this soliloquy it is inferred that *self-esteem*, *acquisitiveness*, and *love of approbation* were strong; and *conscientiousness* and *veneration* moderate — not sufficiently active to keep down the evil thoughts that began to rise in his mind. On another passage of the same tragedy it is remarked, "*Destructiveness*, *secretiveness*, and *cautiousness* seem all to have a share in dictating this speech," [another of Macbeth's] "while *conscientiousness* and the *love of approbation* seem only so far awake as to show him the evil nature of the deeds he is meditating without making him resolve to avoid them."\*

These specimens are sufficient to exhibit the kind of analysis attempted, which, so far from meriting that name, is nothing more than showing how the mental qualities attributed by the poet to Macbeth may be described in phrenological language — no improvement certainly on the original text. There is no new light thrown in any way on the meaning of our great dramatist; or on his powerful description of what is passing in the mind of the future murderer; or on the nature of the passions described.

\* Phrenological Journal, vol. i. p. 97.

How the so-called analysis, amounting as it does to a mere change of terms, should furnish a key to human character and afford an insight into human nature, I am wholly at a loss to discover. Such a transmutation of phrases may possibly inspire the novice with the conceit of having a scientific hold of a subject, by putting into his hands a set of technical terms, in the management of which little difficulty can occur; and about these terms his mind may revolve and seem at once busy and concentrated, when, if not provided with such helps, it might have idly wandered without method or purpose. It is something certainly to have the attention aroused and directed.

Even a false system may give both an impulse and a coherence to a man's thoughts, and conduce to the satisfaction of that longing to account for passing phenomena which is so natural to the mind, and which is so susceptible of being appeased by trivial and even fantastic explanations; but by doing this, the system is likely enough to stop any real advance of knowledge on the subject to which it relates.

If any one, for example, should fancy he understands any better the characteristic feelings and motives of a brave man, by being able to ascribe them technically to certain organs called Destructiveness and Combaticiveness, he would be deceived by mere words, and would probably seek no further knowledge and bestow no further thought in that

particular direction. The notion of being possessed of "a key" to the character, would strongly tend to stop inquiry and prevent reflection.

With a wish to do full justice to the department of inquiry under consideration, I am not able to say that it can render more assistance to any one in the appreciation and description of historical and fictitious characters, than he might derive from an equal attention to their qualities and actions, without possessing any knowledge of phrenology, but at the same time provided with a tolerably precise and consistent nomenclature in which to describe what he observes in himself and his neighbours.

The whole of the preceding observations on phrenology have had in view the original mode of allotting functions to organs, by noting the extraordinary development of particular regions of the cranium in men remarkable for extraordinary endowments or susceptibilities; but they will apply, in the main, or with certain modifications, to the science in the new position in which it has been placed since the alleged discovery of the influence exercised over the organs by mesmeric manipulations.

Admitting this influence without question, for the sake of argument, I think it will be at once acknowledged by the candid inquirer, that it lessens the indefiniteness on which I have insisted in regard to the locality, if not to the boundaries of the



organs, and strengthens the evidence for their several functions.

If an organ can, as these experiments avouch, be roused into action by a touch or pointing of the finger, its locality or relative position to other organs is at all events confirmed, although its limits are still undefined by precise lines. And further, if, when the organ is thus touched or pointed at, particular feelings, ideas, and volitions ensue, you approach nearer than before to the establishment of a connexion between the organ and a class of mental phenomena.

But the business even yet is not so simple and easy as people are apt to suppose. There are in reality great difficulties to be overcome.

It is obvious, that if a single organ were alone in activity, it would be easy enough to determine its function. Such a solitary activity, however, may be said never to occur spontaneously ; and there are no means of insulating an organ so as to dis-sever its action from that of the rest of the organs. We may assume, therefore, that several of them are always in activity although only one is purposely excited. As this nevertheless may be presumed to be more active than the others, the predominant feeling or intellectual operation manifested might be regarded as proceeding from it ; but it is evident that to determine with any precision which of the mental phenomena exhibited are exclusively connected with movements in that organ, and which

of them with movements in other organs, would in the majority of cases require a long and elaborate series of observations, conducted with great patience, nice discrimination, and sound judgment.

It is obvious, too, that this new method of investigation, although it might be serviceable in establishing or confirming the connexion of organ and function, could be of little avail as an instrument for the predication of character.

Thus, however valuable the recently discovered mode of phrenological inquiry may be, the indeterminateness of the two sets of corresponding facts is by no means eliminated, although it is in some respects lessened; nor is there any approach worth speaking of to a perfect set of signs and of things signified, as in the case of vibrating strings and musical notes: there are no movements observed in the organs, and consequently no connexion established between particular motions in the brain and particular mental phenomena. The phrenological organs may still be described as mere superficial and motionless regions or developments of the cranium, capable of indicating only classes of mental characteristics, more or less general or comprehensive.

But the most important consideration remains. Even supposing the discovery in question, to render the connexion between organs and mental phenomena ascertainable with greater precision, still, while it makes the science more complete in its

proper province, it does not at all enlarge its scope, nor set aside the conclusions already arrived at : namely, that all which is peculiar to the science, all which it can claim as exclusively its own, is the establishment of this connexion ; and that whether it be more or less completely accomplished, the moral and intellectual phenomena concerned cannot be elucidated by it, but must ever continue to be learned from internal sources, as they always have been ; on which account the philosophy of mind can never be any other than a philosophy of consciousness.

## LETTER XX.

ANTHROPOLOGY. PROPOSED CLASSIFICATION OF  
INQUIRIES RELATING TO MAN.

IN writing the letters on the connexion between the body and the mind, as it is commonly termed, or the reciprocal dependence of the phenomena of our physical organisation and the phenomena of consciousness, I was more strongly impressed than ever with the expediency, if not the necessity, of dividing our investigations relating to man into a greater number of departments than has, hitherto, been usual, except in the instance of the physical organism, and perhaps also in that of social science; and keeping these departments as distinct as the nature of the case would admit with matters so closely allied. The attempt to make such a division, if it bore no other fruit, would at least not be without advantage in bringing before the eye the relative position in which several subjects of investigation stand to each other.

If we were to comprise all the departments of inquiry relating exclusively to the human race under the term Anthropology, we might proceed, it oc-

curred to me, with the distribution of the subject in something like the following manner: —

# CLASS.

## ANTHROPOLOGY, OR INQUIRIES CONCERNING MAN.

### ORDER I. *Inquiries relating to Man as an Individual.*

- Genus* 1. Relating to his Corporeal Frame or Physical Organization, comprising Anatomy and Physiology.
2. Relating to his Mental Operations and Affections, or the Phenomena of Consciousness (including Language, as connected with Thought and Feeling): a department of inquiry now appropriately termed Psychology, or, if you like the older name, the Philosophy of the Human Mind.
  3. Relating to the mutual dependence or connexion of the Phenomena of our Physical Organization and the Phenomena of Consciousness, which would of course include Cranioscopy or Craniology (the proper designation for the modern Phrenology), and Physiognomy as cultivated by Lavater and others.
  4. Relating to Individual or Personal Character — a department usually referred to Psychology, but admitting of separate cultivation.

### ORDER II. *Inquiries relating to Man as a Social Being.*

- Genus* 1. Relating to Morals, or to Right and Wrong Conduct between Man and Man and other sensitive and intelligent Beings.
2. Relating to Government.
  3. Relating to the Economical Condition of Communities, or Political Economy.
  4. Relating to Language as a medium of intercommunication and influence, including the principles of Exposition and of Rhetoric.

ORDER III. *Inquiries relating to Mankind as to their Origin, Races, Progress, and Civilization.*

These inquiries might have been included as a Genus in the second order, but they will stand very conveniently alone, and might be divided into several genera themselves.

ORDER IV. *Inquiries relating to the connexion of Mankind with Superior Beings, or Theology.*

This distribution of anthropological inquiries, to be correct, must necessarily coincide in many respects with received classifications, and is proposed in its totality merely as tentative or suggestive. It is doubtless exceedingly imperfect, but so simple as not to require much explanation. A few remarks on some of the divisions under the first Order, on account of which the arrangement has in truth been produced, and which more particularly come within the compass of the present letters, are all that I think it needful to lay before you.

With regard to separating our inquiries into the phenomena of consciousness, from those into the reciprocal influence of mind and body (which there is a tendency, I think, in the present age, not to keep sufficiently distinct), it scarcely needs pointing out that there would be ample occupation in both pursuits for the undivided attention of their followers, and that they so far differ as to require, in a great measure, different kinds of mental aptitude. The two would of course be always intimately connected, and the inquirer in one de-

partment would have to acquaint himself more or less with the collateral processes, principles, and results of the other.

The latter, or the inquiry into the mutual influence of the physical and mental parts of our nature, presents not only an important but a very extensive subject, and one which could not be adequately treated until psychology on the one hand, and physiology on the other, had attained something like a mature state.

The affections and operations of the mind, and the structure and organic functions of the body, must be tolerably well known before any investigation of their mutual influence could be satisfactorily attempted. Speculators seem to have sometimes engaged in the inquiry without first determining what were the precise phenomena they were to inquire about.

It would be out of place to do more here than briefly advert to two or three of the principal topics embraced by it.

The connexion between the structure of the brain, or rather the form, size, composition, arrangement, or other incidents, of its several parts, and mental qualities or characteristics, may be cited as one of the most interesting.

It is scarcely needful under this head to repeat the mention of phrenology. There is evidently no insuperable difficulty in tracing a connexion between the form, size, and internal structure of any part,

and certain mental qualities, provided it exists; or in showing the groundlessness of asserting it, provided it does not exist.

The problem is both within the range of experience, and worthy of investigation.

Closely allied to and scarcely separable indeed from the preceding topic, is the connexion between the changes or movements in the nerves, as well as other tissues and mental events.

We have grounds for inferring that no mental affection or operation takes place without some antecedent change in the state of the brain and nerves, although we are unacquainted with the nature of these changes: and from their being inaccessible to direct observation we are likely enough long to remain so.

It is a subject, however, concerning which we ought to be at once alive to the least gleam of evidence, and on our guard against the strong temptation to indulge in gratuitous theories. We shall not be wrong in discarding merely hypothetical explanations destitute of proof (Dr. Hartley's vibrations for instance) as fruitless or rather preventive of real progress. The kind of movement in the nerves is, as far as I am informed, yet undetermined, notwithstanding the discovery that certain nerves are concerned exclusively in the physical process instrumental to perception, and others in the process instrumental to willing — a discovery which (it may be remarked by the way)



throws no light either on the nature of the two mental acts (how should it ?) or the nature of the physiological motions concerned.

Turning to the other phase of the connexion we find that certain mental affections can be traced to their effects on certain tissues of the body. Shame produces blushing, fear paleness and tremor, wit and humour laughter; and other feelings seem severally to disturb, to impede, or to stimulate the action and secretions of some one or more tissues or organs. Cabanis has well described the unsuspected muscular vigour which a man finds in himself when under the influence of energetic passions.\* All these phenomena and others akin to them are worthy of minute scrutiny.

The effects of external agents, applied to the body, upon the phenomena of the mind form another topic under this head, and one perhaps more accessible to investigation and more promising in results than any of those hitherto mentioned.

One of the subjects falling within its scope is the mental influence, temporary or permanent, of various substances—food and medicine, stimulants and sedatives—received into the stomach; a very interesting and important inquiry, which has been hitherto greatly neglected, by English philosophers at least, but which would repay an almost exclusive devotion to it, while it would come within the

\* *Rapports du Physique et du Moral de L'Homme*, tom. i. p. 175. Quatrième Éd.

range of the purely mental philosopher only as a subsidiary topic.\*

This is only one amongst a multitude of interesting researches which a division like that I have suggested would bring into more distinct apprehension, and probably incite inquirers to undertake; such as will rise to view at the mention of the effects of light, heat, various conditions of the atmosphere, and other elements of climate, with numerous other agents producing modifications of mind through the physical organs and tissues.

In fact, the connexion of mind and body abounds with weighty but neglected questions, and questions too of a nice and difficult nature. The work of the eminent French author whom I have already cited is full of information and suggestions on many of them.

\* The reader may be amused with the following illustration of the subject here lightly touched upon; it is highly characteristic of the admirable writer :—

“I am convinced,” says Sydney Smith, in one of his Letters, “that digestion is the great secret of life; and that character, talents, virtues, and qualities are powerfully affected by beef, mutton, pie-crust, and rich soups. I have often thought I could feed or starve men into many virtues and vices, and affect them more powerfully with my instruments of cookery than Timotheus could do formerly with his lyre.” — *Memoirs of Sydney Smith*, vol. ii. p. 405. To this may be added the assertion of Cabanis, that in certain countries, where the indigent class live almost exclusively on chestnuts, buck-wheat, and other gross aliments, there is to be remarked in that entire class an almost total want of intelligence, and a singular slowness in their determinations and movements. — *Rapports*, tom. ii. p. 58.

In reference to the division concerning Individual or Personal Character, I may remark that it would be advantageous on several accounts to keep it distinct from Psychology, which, when confined to its proper objects, is chiefly occupied in describing, classifying, and bringing under general laws, the phenomena of consciousness common to all mankind, and deals with Individual Character only incidentally and briefly—too briefly for the importance of the subject.

The expediency of making the latter a separate department of inquiry, will be more readily admitted if we consider that character is constituted not by peculiar qualities, but chiefly by the proportion in which mental properties common to the individual with the rest of his species are manifested.

The elements of a man's character may be stated to be mainly the following:—

1. The predominance of certain feelings, propensities, and desires in his mind over others which, although existing there, are less marked, such as fear, hope, resentment, the love of approbation, conscientiousness, curiosity, benevolence, ambition, and so on; all of which may be found united in infinitely varying proportions.

2. His being able to perform certain intellectual operations better than other operations, such as remembering better than imagining or reasoning, and conversely reasoning better than remembering.

3. His being able to perform these and other intellectual operations much better in respect to certain objects than in respect to other objects. Thus one man will recollect, imagine, and reason about mechanical matters more readily than he will perform those operations in the case of mental phenomena; and another will remember mathematical figures and draw conclusions respecting them, with more facility than he will perform similar acts in reference to the incidents of common life, to music, or to poetry.

One important ingredient in the aptitude for particular arts or sciences, is being able to form clear and steady mental representations of the objects in which they deal, when such objects are not present. To grasp them firmly in conception is manifestly indispensable both to devising new combinations and to reasoning on their results whilst yet untried.\*

4. The energy or feebleness of his volitions—his acts of willing. The observation is anything but new, that we frequently see men of strong intellect combined with weak powers of volition, and *vice versa*. Coleridge was a notorious example of the former.

5. His physical endowments or the qualities of his bodily constitution, the perpetual consciousness

\* It is the want of this power of clear conception which, as it appears to me, leads writers into mixed metaphors, as well as other both rhetorical and logical incongruities.

of which (not to mention other effects) enters largely into the composition of his character. Of this remark Lord Byron may be cited as an illustration. The contrast between the mental effects of a consciousness of great muscular vigour on the one hand, and muscular feebleness on the other, has been well drawn by Cabanis.

The attributes or characteristics above enumerated being the results partly of natural constitution and partly of the peculiar habits and associations superinduced by the particular circumstances in which the individual has been placed, or by the discipline through which he has passed, there is ample room in this province of inquiry for the exercise of the most sedulous observation and the most discriminating sagacity.

It is this science of character which constitutes a great part of the modern Phrenology; and from which, I may say, have been gathered the chief fruits of that department of knowledge as actually cultivated. As a philosophy of mind, phrenology can, as we have seen, do little or nothing: as a system of cranioscopy, by assisting us in the appreciation of the natural qualities of individual men, it may do more; and in calling attention to peculiarities of conduct and constitution, it has actually, although from no exclusive sources, thrown useful light on the special department of Anthropology before us.

The advantages of dividing our investigations

concerning mankind in the way proposed, without insulating any of them, would, I apprehend, be the same as we see attend the separation of physical science into so many different sections. The several departments here sketched out, although some of them would be often united, would usually be pursued by different individuals as their peculiar qualifications and opportunities might determine, and such a division of labour would doubtless have the usual beneficial results.

Above all, so far from preventing or impeding large and comprehensive views of human nature, it would not fail to multiply the points of speculation presented to the man of a powerful intellectual grasp.

It may be said indeed that the end here in contemplation will be naturally effected (and has already been partially so) in the progress of knowledge, during which such divisions as are now recommended, present themselves as matters of course when the necessity arises, without any preconcerted distribution such as I have formally suggested : and the assertion that it will be effected, and is even now in process of being accomplished, is true enough ; but then it must be recollected that such tentative distinctions and classifications (I offer mine in no other light) far from being useless or supererogatory, are themselves steps towards the goal which we are looking to reach. Although they are often silently made in the prosecution of

inquiry, it is not without advantage to the inquirer to have them beforehand distinctly set forth.

The supposed objection would be levelled against taking measures expressly adapted to further a certain end, on the ground that there were other causes already in operation which would also contribute to effect it, and might perhaps accomplish it alone if there were leisure to wait.

## LETTER XXI.

THE PRESENT CONDITION, ESTIMATION, AND PROSPECTS  
OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND.

ON casting a retrospective glance over the two series of letters which I am now hastening to close, I cannot help being sensible that the philosophy of the human mind, as received and taught by its most eminent cultivators, stands out in my representations as being in an extremely unsatisfactory condition. In regard to this point you will see that I coincide in a great measure with the late Sydney Smith, who, in a passage which I have before quoted, declared that the language and divisions of intellectual philosophy appeared to him to be in a most barbarous state.\*

I shall not now attempt to enter further, except incidentally, into the causes of this disheartening position of the science, but will content myself with offering a few remarks in vindication of its rank and importance, and with briefly touching on one or two considerations which claim to be attended to in all endeavours to improve what so much wants improvement.

\* Memoir of the Rev. Sydney Smith, vol. ii. p. 23.



Of one thing we may at the outset make ourselves sure: there can be no real progress in mental philosophy without the most careful precision of language, the uniform and consistent employment of all terms on which our statements and inferences depend, and the rigorous exclusion of fictitious entities and imaginary events. Neither can any progress be achieved without minute self-introspection, nor without the trouble (or the tediousness if you will) of making very nice and subtle distinctions amongst the phenomena of consciousness, as well as the words in which they are described; and, what is of equal moment, in the views right or wrong which have been taken of them.

These are the indispensable means of uprooting error and establishing truth on a subject of so much difficulty.

Yet such close research, rigorous precision, and nice distinctions in mental philosophy as are here insisted upon, have been contemptuously decried, and stigmatised as vain, shadowy, and valueless, even by some of those who eagerly extol the minutest inquiries of physical science.

What! shall thousands of scientific men with triumphant acclaim employ themselves in almost infinitesimal physical investigations; in searching into the atomic composition and microscopic structure of bodies; in exploring the innumerable forms of animal and vegetable life which are invisible to the unassisted sight; in discovering planets that

have for ages rolled unmarked through their obscure orbits; in condensing with telescopic power into suns and systems what was recently regarded (so to speak) as the elemental vapour of stars\*; in throwing into arithmetical expression inconceivably rapid vibrations in the apparently steady ray that even the strongest wind cannot shake; thus bringing into view from the distant and the diminutive, the most recondite parts of the material universe; and shall the exact analysis of the phenomena of consciousness, the discrimination of differences in feelings and intellectual operations however fine and minute, the vigilant detection of the subtlest concatenations of thought, the firm yet delicate grasp of mental analogies which elude the rough and careless handling of common observation, the nice appreciation of language and of all its changing hues and latent expedients, the decomposition of the processes of reasoning and laying bare the foundations of evidence, shall these, I say, be stigmatised as an

\* It was the hypothesis of Laplace "that systems of revolving planets, of which the solar system is an example, arise from the gradual contraction and separation of vast masses of nebulous matter. Yet it does not appear that any changes have been observed in nebulae which tend to confirm this hypothesis; and the most powerful telescope in the world, recently erected by the Earl of Rosse, has given results which militate against the hypothesis; inasmuch as *it has been shown that what appeared a diffused nebulous mass is, by a greater power of vision, resolved, in all cases yet examined, into separate stars.*"—*History of the Inductive Sciences*, by Dr. Whewell, latest edition, vol. ii. p. 29.

over-exercise of acuteness, a waste of analytic power, a useless splitting of hairs, and a worthless weaving of cobwebs? Amidst the honours lavished on investigations into the most secluded recesses of the material world, are we to be told that the close and minute and discriminating examination of our own mental nature is a vain and superfluous labour leading to no beneficial or important issue?

Believe it not: rest assured that here untiring investigation, minute analysis, close scrutiny, careful discrimination of things apt to be confounded, scrupulous accuracy in pursuing processes, and precision in recording results, are as apposite, as fruitful, as important, as indispensable, as dignified if you will, as they are (I say it without disparagement) in tracking invisible stars, calculating the millions of imperceptible undulations in a ray of light, weighing the atoms of chemical elements, peering into the cells of organic structures\*,

\* These are really interesting and important investigations: the following passage from an eminent naturalist will nevertheless justify the description in the text. "Cells," says Professor Owen, "predominate in the tissues of the vegetable kingdom, the lower members of which consist exclusively of them, and have been thence called 'plantæ cellulares:' the lowest of all consist of a single nucleated cell. The animal kingdom starts from the same elementary beginning: a cell-wall forms the smooth, elastic, and contractile integument of the *Gregarina*: a fluid with granules, and a firm nucleus which sometimes contains one or more nucleoli, — the ordinary cell contents — are the sole representatives of organs or viscera." — *Parthenogenesis*, p. 6.

studying the anatomy of mites and midges\*, and even searching into the specific characters and peculiar habits of molluscs and animalcules.

But this is not the only kind of depreciation and disparagement which mental philosophy has had to sustain. Strange to say, a man of science who has attempted to grasp the whole body of human knowledge†, has pronounced that the pretended direct contemplation of the mind by itself is a pure illusion. The fallacy of this notable declaration it is not difficult to see. It is worthy of a completer examination than the incidental one which is all that, were I so disposed, I could now consistently give it; but should I live to send you a third series of philosophical letters, I hope to show the untenableness of the position and the source of the mistake.

The depreciation of a department of inquiry which concerns itself, professedly, with only internal objects and events is scarcely to be wondered at in the mass, although it may be surprising in a philosopher.

\* I hope the *acarus* and the *culex* will not disdain to recognise themselves under these humble appellations. I may add, that in the Handbook of Natural History, used in the schools and colleges of France, which I have just happened to take up, I find the anatomy and physiology of insects, molluscs, and animalcules occupy a considerable space both in the text and the plates, showing the importance attached to these minute inquiries.

† M. Comte: "Cette prétendue contemplation directe de l'esprit par lui-même est une pure illusion."— *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, tom. i. p. 35.

Mankind are pre-eminently a sensuous and mechanical race. Long before they know themselves, their own mental and physical qualities, their relations to each other and to surrounding circumstances, their rank in the scale of being, what they may rationally hope and rationally fear; while still floundering about their own position in the universe, and blindly wandering into courses of action which, although they are too ignorant to discern it, lead them headlong to their own misery; they exhibit the most astonishing proofs of mechanical ingenuity and dexterous handling generally of the properties of matter.

Thus nations who cannot with any accuracy be called morally civilised, barbarians in personal habits, in domestic morals, in social customs and political arrangements, in theological dogmas and ecclesiastical institutions, in self-knowledge and consecutive thought, have left behind them monuments of architecture, sculpture, dynamical art and manufactural skill, which are viewed with astonishment and admiration by the most advanced people of modern times.

And even we, who plume ourselves on the high position in refinement which we have attained, can we pretend that it is essentially different with us? Is the civilisation in which we have made a progress more than physical? \*

\* "Let us not deceive ourselves. Like the man who used to pull off his hat with great demonstrations of respect whenever he spoke of himself, we are fond of styling our own the *en-*

Our great achievements are only triumphs of material science and mechanical art, while in all that constitutes moral progress, in the cognisance of what is purely internal, in the knowledge of the dependence of mental causes and effects, and their connexion with physical circumstances; of the nature and varieties of intellectual and emotional processes; of the true character and use of evidence on which so immense a superstructure must always rest; of the wisest modes of individual and social procedure so as to insure all practicable happiness to every human being; of the best methods of cultivating the nature of every man so as to bring out its capabilities and make him no unworthy specimen of his race—in the knowledge of all such things, and above all, in the appreciation of what is purest and noblest in spirit and in conduct, we have comparatively speaking made scarcely a perceptible advance.

Is proof required? What proof of some of these assertions can be more striking than the derogatory attributes and procedures which we still continue to embody in our conceptions of a Supreme, Perfect, and Infallible Being?

Or turning towards what solely concerns our mundane affairs, for evidence on other points, look

*lightened age*: though as Jortin, I think, has wittily remarked, the *golden age* would be more appropriate."—*Coleridge's Friend*. This is now a somewhat trite saying, but the important question is, does it not still point to a truth?

at the grovelling earthly superstitions, the absurd doctrines, the mean sentiments, of which we are the slaves; and at the rapacity, the frauds, the wars, and the still pettier hostilities and quarrels by which we ignorantly or wantonly destroy the happiness or create the misery of ourselves and our kind. And even irrespective of crime and violence, look at the wretched economical condition of a large section of the people in every so-called enlightened country—in itself a signal proof of our incapacity to understand and deal with our own position.

The discrepancy, too, between our rapid strides in physical science, and our tardy progress in moral and intellectual knowledge and its application; in the science of human nature and human welfare; seems to become every day wider and more conspicuous. We are truly, as it has been said by some one, “immersed in matter.” If civilisation may be compared, as it sometimes is, to a rising tide with its alternate advances and retrocessions, it would be difficult to show, as far as morality, mental refinement, and general happiness are concerned, that it is not in the present age at a very low ebb.

Is it then in this position of human affairs that any department of what may be called non-physical in contradistinction to physical inquiry, is to be depreciated or even neglected and excluded from the benefit of all that subtlety of research and minuteness of discrimination which are so freely

bestowed on the most obscure and unobtrusive appearances of the material universe?

Surely at no time could it ever be more expedient, if not imperative, to look into our own nature and to direct accurate observation and precise thinking to moral, mental, and social inquiries of all kinds, than it is at present, even if it were only as a counterpoise to all the more engrossing influences to which I have adverted.

The intrinsic difficulty of such inquiries compared with those of a physical character, or, what perhaps amounts to the same thing, the natural inaptitude or distaste of mankind for them, renders it the more to be desired that minds, especially young minds, gifted with the peculiar genius requisite, should at least not be discouraged from yielding to their constitutional bent and pursuing their proper course.

Positive encouragement is scarcely to be looked for, if for no other reason than the formidable errors and prejudices which block the way. Besides the blunders of ordinary men, some of the most powerful minds that have appeared in the world, in exemplification (it might be said) of the constitutional inaptness of the human understanding for non-physical speculations, have employed themselves in building up ingenious systems destitute alike of sound foundation and natural coherence, as if they imagined their business was to construct truth instead of to discover it.



Errors of any kind which have established themselves in the world are of course serious impediments to progress, and can be overturned and removed only by earnest perseverance and repeated efforts ; but they are especially difficult to contend with when they have been fixed in the minds of men not only by tradition but by the authority of great names.

To push aside such as now prevail and replace them by simple truth, is a work requiring all the acuteness and vigour of intellect, depth of thought, closeness of investigation, subtile discrimination, and punctilious accuracy, which the whole human race are for many ages likely to spare from their addiction to material research ; and hence the science of man as a moral, intellectual, sensitive, and social being must, at present and for a long period to come, be in a great measure a militant science — a work of comment and criticism and contest — and cannot be expected in any of its departments to make a rapid advance.

With regard to my special subject, the philosophy of mind, which must always constitute the foundation of non-physical science of every description, I venture to repeat the prediction that no great progress will be made by those who prosecute it, and that they will continue to move in a circle, until they consent to do what successful physical inquirers do, namely, to dismiss all figurative statements of fact, all fictitious entities and occur-

rences, all abstractions except as mere forms of expression, all hypotheses but such as may be professedly put forth in the character of tentative suppositions; and to confine themselves to real objects, actual events, literal statements, and rigorous conclusions.

On the two latter points it is doubtless a disadvantage, and one that in the nature of the case must always attend a department of knowledge which deals with the common thoughts and feelings and mutual relations of men, that there is no exclusive scientific nomenclature appropriated to designate the operations and affections of the mind, but the philosopher is obliged, for the most part, to make use of the terms employed in common conversation and daily intercourse: employed, too, in the generality of cases either with very loose and indefinite meanings, or in more senses than one.

There are several momentous evils flowing from this want of a peculiar nomenclature.

It occasions great difficulty in always keeping to one precise sense, even on the part of the most exact thinker. It also operates to prevent the reception of doctrines which are really true, in consequence of the paradoxical air that, curiously enough, is frequently thrown over accurate and important conclusions by rigid adherence to the employment of terms in only one acceptance.

Worse perhaps than all, it tends to inspire the incompetent with the conceit that they can under-

stand and are qualified to pass judgment on doctrines far beyond their capacity because they have taken no pains to gain the requisite knowledge. As every word is one they are familiar with and presents no superficial difficulty, not the least suspicion enters their minds that it may be necessary to pause and ponder on the drift of the propositions before them; and they are fully satisfied with the negative result of meeting with no verbal stoppage.

On this point I beg your attention to what I have said in a former treatise not unknown to you. I am not sure that I could express my meaning better were I to attempt a fresh exposition, and to save you the trouble of reference, I will here introduce the passage (of no great length) to which I allude.

Speaking of the necessity of vigorous application, it proceeds, "We are apt to be deceived in this respect on subjects relating to morals. The terms employed are such as are daily used in the common intercourse of life, and we imagine we at once comprehend any doctrines which they are the medium of expressing. In physical science, where at every step we are encountered by the difficulties of a technical phraseology, as well as of practical observations and experiments, we immediately feel the necessity of a regular application and progression, of mastering one principle before we proceed to the next, of carrying our object by detail, working our way by vigorous and reiterated efforts. In

morals, on the contrary, we are too apt to be content with mere cursory reading: no difficulties are presented by the language, no unusual terms arrest our progress, no particular experiments demand a pause to verify them, and we glide smoothly along the pages of the profoundest treatise, with an apparently clear apprehension of the various propositions we meet with, but in reality with a vague conception of their full drift and precise meaning. Hence people are often deluded into fancying themselves competent to pronounce a decision on questions requiring severe study, great nicety of discrimination, and close logical deduction.”\*

The same deceptive facility of superficial comprehension is one source even amongst philosophers of the not uncommon phenomenon of misconceiving and misrepresenting each other's doctrines.

From the frequency of such misrepresentations it would seem to be one of the most difficult things in the world to give a correct account of any philosophical theory.

Nor can there be the faintest doubt in the mind of any one who has tried the experiment, that it is exceedingly difficult, demanding much study and great care; difficult, partly because it is requisite to undergo the trouble of placing ourselves at the author's particular point of view, while we are too engrossed by our own preconceptions to be able or

\* Essay on the Pursuit of Truth, p. 78, second edit.

disposed to do it; partly because we are apt to catch up general assertions without attending to the context containing modifications by which they are accompanied and restricted; partly because there are real inconsistencies, of which the writer himself is unaware, between different parts of the same exposition, whence discordant interpretations are unavoidably put upon his doctrine by various readers. And these sources of misrepresentation, if not engendered, are heightened and aggravated by the necessity of employing a lax and popular phraseology.\*

Such evils are undeniable, but not, in my opinion, to be remedied by any attempt to form a peculiar and scientific nomenclature. They will be best obviated by an endeavour after rigorous precision and consistency in the use of common phraseology, aided by a careful study of the various expedients of language (many of them little noted if not wholly overlooked) natural to mankind in the exercise of their gift of speech.

From these observations one truth may be deduced, which, however manifest it may be, is too frequently unheeded, that a department of knowledge destitute of a specific nomenclature, far from not demanding on that account equally

\* I have already had occasion to point out various misrepresentations, or to say the least, discordant representations of the theories of Berkeley on Vision and on the External World, which fully exemplify the remarks in the text.

minute and devoted application to it, requires even more than a science which possesses one.

No physical or physiological or mathematical science, neither astronomy, nor mechanics, nor chemistry, nor any of the sciences of organic nature, nor yet of calculation and measurement, exacts a longer, closer, and steadier dedication of time and attention to it than the Philosophy of the Human Mind.

THE END.

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LETTERS  
ON THE  
PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND.

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BY SAMUEL BAILEY,  
AUTHOR OF 'ESSAYS ON THE FORMATION AND PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS,' ETC.

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## PREFACE.

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It would be unreasonable to expect that the Third Series of a work like the present, should attract the attention of any but the possessors and the readers of the two preceding volumes. To them it may be of more or less interest to be informed, that the Series now submitted to the Public, after an interval of nearly five years, concludes the Author's disquisitions on the Philosophy of the Human Mind, at least under the present title. He may repeat here what he said in his last Preface, that the subjects treated in the following Letters are not inferior in importance to their predecessors; and he has certainly not bestowed inferior care on the difficulties they present. In the course of discussing them, he has had frequent occasion, as a cursory inspection will discover, to contest the opinions and to criticise the arguments of several eminent living writers. If he has done

this with the freedom due to truth, he has not, he trusts, infringed that courtesy which men earnestly engaged in the cause of moral and intellectual advancement, have a right to expect from each other.

*December 10, 1862.*

# CONTENTS.



LETTER	PAGE
<u>I. M. COMTE ON PSYCHOLOGY</u>	1
<u>II. IDENTITY</u>	14
<u>III. CAUSATION</u>	28
<u>IV.        </u> "	42
<u>V. EVIDENCE</u>	52
<u>VI. LAWS OF NATURE</u>	65
<u>VII. LANGUAGE</u>	85
<u>VIII.       </u> "	100
<u>IX.       </u> "	115
<u>X.       </u> "	136
<u>XI.       </u> "	157
<u>XII.       </u> "	170
<u>XIII. MORAL SENTIMENTS</u>	193
<u>XIV.       </u> "	199
<u>XV.       </u> "	223
<u>XVI.       </u> "	242
<u>NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS</u>	261
<u>LIST OF THE AUTHOR'S WORKS</u>	271

# LETTERS

ON THE

## PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN MIND.

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### LETTER I.

#### M. COMTE ON PSYCHOLOGY.

IN the conclusion of my Second Series of Letters on the Philosophy of the Human Mind, I held out to you a promise, that if I should live to publish another series, I would examine Comte's doctrine that the direct contemplation of the mind by itself is a pure illusion, and that hence there can be no such science as the so-called Psychology.\*

He goes on to tell us that the human mind can observe directly all phenomena but its own proper ones. For by what or by whom shall the observation be made? It is conceivable, with regard to moral phenomena, that man can observe himself as to the passions which animate him, for the

\* Cours de Philosophie Positive, par M. Auguste Comte, tome i. p. 35.

anatomical reason that the organs which are their seat are distinct from those destined to the observing functions.

Such observations, however, cannot, he holds, be of much scientific importance, and the best means of knowing the passions will be to observe them externally, for all marked state of passion is necessarily incompatible with the state of observation.

But as to observing in the same way the intellectual phenomena while they are passing, there is in it a manifest impossibility. The thinking individual cannot divide himself into two, one of which shall reason and the other look on. The observed and observing organs being in this case identical, how can the observation take place?

The passage in Comte's *Positive Philosophy* of which the above is a faithful representation,\* appears to me to abound in errors, and errors, too, lying on the surface. I marvel that a man of his powers could fall into such transparent fallacies.

These errors combined show an utter misconception of the way in which the knowledge of our own minds arises, and prove, at the same time, the danger of indiscriminately applying to purely mental phenomena the language which originates in our perception of what is external — an application which our author makes with unsuspecting intrepidity. A great part of Comte's argument, it

\* The original text is given in Note A at the end of the present volume.

will doubtless have been remarked, turns on the word "observe."

If we borrow this term from the cognisance we take of external things, and apply it to that which we have of mental conditions, we must bear in mind that, like other language used to designate the incidents of thought and feeling, it is figurative; and we shall grievously err if, from the analogy implied in the term, we proceed as a matter of course to impose upon internal phenomena consequences which may be truly enough ascribed to those external events to which the term is literally applicable.

We "observe" external things, says M. Comte, through the eye, while we do not see the eye itself, nor the picture on the retina, or, to express the latter proposition in common but erroneous language, the eye does not "observe" itself. The fact, howsoever it may be described, is admitted.

It is admitted, too, that we may use the same term "observe" in speaking of mental phenomena: we may correctly enough say that we "observe" internal states and operations.

So far the expression can involve no mistake, but here the analogy between the cognisance of external and that of internal phenomena ceases.

There is nothing in the mind of which we can go on to say, as we say of the eye, that it cannot be seen by the observer in the act of observation; or in shorter phrase cannot observe itself.



The expression "we observe our internal states," simply means we are conscious of them, and the real amount of the assertion M. Comte makes is, that we, being the intelligent entities of whom states of consciousness are affections, cannot be conscious of them — that is, cannot be conscious of what we are conscious of. If we ascribe a more complex signification to the phrase "observing internal states," by including in it not only the consciousness of a direct mental act, but the subsequent recollection of it, or reflection upon it, the argument against M. Comte would be strengthened, were it for no other reason than this, that recollection and reflection are themselves modes of consciousness.

M. Comte, it is true, disguises this fallacy from himself by appealing to the phrenological organs, and in them finds an analogy with the eye. He has recourse to what he terms the anatomical reason, that as the eye cannot observe itself, so the organ of observation in the brain, although it may observe the organs of the passions, cannot observe itself.

This allegation, however, will not avail him, even if we admit the existence of phrenological organs. Organs of any kind, whether of the senses, or cranial, or cerebral, can neither observe nor feel. It is only figuratively that we talk of the eye seeing. It is not the eye that sees but the man through the instrumentality of the eye. So

with phrenological organs. If there is such an organ as that of observation, it most undoubtedly cannot observe itself or its own operations; and it was quite needless for M. Comte to waste a word in asserting the negative fact; but then it is equally true that the organ in question cannot observe the organs of the passions any more than itself, although the author not only pronounces the process to be conceivable, but speaks of it as actually occurring. The observation of one organ by another of which he talks so volubly, springing as it does out of a mere personification, is, in truth, as pure a fiction as the volition ascribed by Kepler to the planets, and has no foundation in nature. What then becomes of M. Comte's argument, that we cannot observe the intellectual operations within us because an organ cannot observe itself? The premises have vanished.

For the reasons here assigned, I conceive the doctrine of M. Comte as to the impossibility of observing our own states of consciousness, and the consequent inanity of Psychology to be utterly fallacious, to have no ground whatever to stand upon; and it is really amazing or amusing, according as we may take it, that a positive philosopher demanding realities at every step, should thus have founded a theory on purely fictitious facts.

But the subject admits of farther elucidation.

The knowledge which a man has of any of his own states of consciousness (except in the first

evanescent stage) implies two things: (1) having been in that state; (2) recollecting it. The first step in acquiring knowledge must be noticing, or discerning, or being conscious of something or other; but as this is a fugitive event, permanent knowledge cannot be said to exist unless what was noticed is remembered. Remembrance is essential to it.

Now no one, not even M. Comte, would assert that we are unable to recollect our states of intellectual consciousness; that we have no remembrance of our reasonings, our imaginations, our suppositions, our theories, our castles in the air, as well as of our feelings and passions, our being in love or being in a rage; and if we remember such states, we must have been in them, and have been conscious at the time (if I may be pardoned for uttering an identical proposition) that we were in them. As we cannot recollect what never took place, so we cannot recollect what we never took cognisance of. Recollection presupposes both the actual occurrence and the mental notice of what is recollected. If all this does not imply internal observation, if it does not present materials for discernment, comparison, classification, and inference, I know not what does; and these are some of the processes which applied to such materials constitute the Psychology which our author condemns. If we can recollect mental affections and operations, we can certainly discern

amongst them resemblances and differences, causes and effects, co-existences and consecutions. What is there to prevent us?

If we compare the materials and processes just described with those of physical science, we shall find the two although diverse in some things yet parallel in the main, especially in reference to the fugitiveness of the phenomena, and the great share which recollection necessarily has in the act of acquiring knowledge of all kinds.

Our knowledge of external things, in strict analogy with our knowledge of internal, implies, first, observation of the phenomena, and secondly, as equally indispensable, recollection of them. Whatever might be the acuteness and comprehensiveness of our observation outward, we should be just as imbecile amongst external objects and events without memory as we should be amongst those which are internal. Recollection is alike indispensable for acquiring or using or constituting the knowledge of either.

Nor (to make the parallel closer) are the phenomena of the external world, or at least a great multitude of them that are subjected to scientific observation, less fugitive than those of the mind; but, as we all admit, the shifting or transitory character of physical events does not preclude a scientific acquaintance with them.

In making a chemical experiment, for example, we see the phenomena pass before us with great

rapidity; the chemical union or the chemical separation of two substances is instantaneous; the flash or the explosion is gone in a moment; they are not events to be detained while we deliberately watch them, and unless we could recollect what we saw and heard, as we recollect the similarly transient events of consciousness, we could not possess physical knowledge. Every step of the process, so to speak, perishes in detail and becomes a remembered incident, taking its place in the connected sequence which appears in our mental review.

An apposite illustration of the resemblance between mental and physical events in the circumstance here insisted upon, may be found in the course of a ship at sea. She is constantly rolling and pitching; frequently changing her direction; going first on one tack and then on another; having sails hoisted or lowered; reefs taken in or let out; sometimes advancing rapidly, sometimes floating like a log on the water; and we see her in any one precise position only a single moment; yet closely observing and noting and recollecting every thing that passed, we can take a connected retrospect and give a tolerably accurate account of her proceedings.

So with the mind we are conscious of operations and affections, mutable and fugitive as the motions of a ship at sea; yet like those making an impression at the time, and subjects of distinct recol-

lection and reflection, comparison and classification afterwards.

There is another inadmissible remark in the passage cited from Comte, which may deserve a separate comment.

After allowing that a man may make internal observation of his own passions, since the organs of observation and of feeling are distinct, he goes on to say, "Such observations, however, cannot be of much scientific importance, and the best means of knowing the passions will be to observe them externally, for all marked state of passion is necessarily incompatible with the state of observation."

On this I have first to remark that neither of the modes pointed out, neither external nor internal observation of the working of a passion, can be omitted in any full and accurate study of it. Both are requisite for complete knowledge.

If, however, a comparison, not needed, is to be instituted and any superiority be awarded to either over the other, it cannot with any shadow of reason be given to that to which M. Comte has assigned it.

While external observation is of undeniable importance, internal observation is absolutely indispensable. Unless a man had himself been the subject of any given passion, he would be utterly incapable of interpreting the actions of others to which it gives rise.

We can conceive a human being to be pretty

familiar with a passion he has often felt; with the circumstances by which it is aroused and directed, exasperated and mitigated; and with the conduct into which it leads him; although he has never had an opportunity of watching the effects of the passion on the behaviour of another. Self-study without extrinsic observation, might carry him a long way.

But, on the other hand, it would be plainly impossible for any one who had never experienced a passion himself to form a conception of the actuating motives of his neighbours while they were under its influence, and impossible to ascribe their actions to the right source. To him all would be inscrutable. They would be playing a game before his eyes of which he had never learned the moves, and which he would be wholly incapable of following.

There are obviously two different sets of circumstances to be learned in order to have the best possible knowledge of any given passion: (1) The course of the passion as we ourselves feel it in all its ebbs and flows, and their causes, together with the actions which it prompts us to do: (2) The actions which we observe it to prompt our neighbours to do, and which we attribute to the influence of the passion from extending to others the observations we have made on ourselves.

When any emotional law or mode of action is established by a concurrence of both kinds of

circumstances accurately noted, it has of course better claims to be accepted than if it had been founded on one, just as other laws derived from full and accurate examination have a superiority over such as are deduced from partial and incomplete evidence.\*

The last part of the passage cited from Comte is scarcely happier than the preceding. All marked states of passion, he asserts, are incompatible with the state of observation—a position vague enough, but which means, I presume, or ought to mean to be pertinent, that when a man is filled with intense love or fear or joy or hope, he cannot observe the course or procedure of the emotion by which he is possessed. Why not? A man under the influence of some strong passion has certainly vivid ideas as well as vivid feeling, and what he so feels and thinks and imagines, leaves a deep impression on his memory. What is this but, as I have already explained, internal observation? It would scarcely have been more wide of the mark, had he said that a philosopher enthusiastically devoted to some physical science could not on account of his very

\* The observations in the text may serve also as a reply to part of Mr. Buckle's disparagement of Psychology in his "History of Civilisation in England," see vol. i. pp. 16 and 144. With all his acknowledged ability and learning, he appears to me, I confess, to give very loose and inexact representations of metaphysical doctrines, and to be unacquainted with much that has been done in mental philosophy. (This note was written before his lamented death.)



enthusiastic devotion to it, observe the phenomena which the science presented. The author, I apprehend, was unwittingly thinking of a very different position, which may be readily mistaken for the one he has laid down, and which he seems accordingly to have confused with it—the position, namely, that a mind possessed with a powerful passion is often so engrossed with it and its accessories as to overlook every thing else, the whole attention, for the time, being absorbed by the predominant perturbation. This, however, is a very different thing from the mind not observing its own state, or a man not observing his own mental condition.

Wherever there is strong passion, there must be (for it is the same thing in different words) strong impressions and consequent strong recollections and reflections connected with it; in a word, all that constitutes vivid and active internal observation, furnishing materials for thought and classification and inference. What is not compatible with such a state of passion is the clear and full observation at the same time of present objects and passing events totally unconnected with it.

It is a singular circumstance that Comte, who was so hostile to those metaphysical entities which he represents as having in the progress of mankind long ruled the world, should not have discerned that in his depreciation or rather attempted destruction of Psychology, he was proceeding on an

assumption of just the same kind of fictitious personifications. His faculties observing each other are not a whit more real, have no more positive existence, than the crowd of metaphysical principles whose reign he traces or points to in the history of the past.

And not only did he fall into this capital inconsistency, but he was at the same time overlooking as subjects of systematic knowledge, the whole world of the phenomena of pure consciousness, and unphilosophically reducing or wishing to reduce the science of man to little else than physical manifestations and external actions.

## LETTER II.

## IDENTITY.

AN author who has written an able analysis of the human mind, says that "identity is a case of belief;" that when we affirm of an object to-day that it is the same object we saw yesterday, we merely express our belief that it is a particular object.\*

That we have the belief is certain, but surely this is not all. Besides the belief there is the fact which is the subject of belief. Belief may be correct or incorrect, but this does not affect the fact which is what it is, however we may regard it.

Such an account of identity is evidently an imperfect one: it is a statement of what we do when we affirm anything to be the same, not an explanation of what sameness consists in.

Let us try if something more precise and definite cannot be wrought out. For this purpose it may be requisite, perhaps, to hazard some trite propositions as stepping-stones to others not equally evident.

1. Every particle in the universe is itself and

\* Analysis of the Human Mind, by James Mill.

not some other particle:\* it has an existence, an individuality, distinct from that of every other thing, and if we speak of it as existing at two different points of time, we say it is the same particle at one time as it was at the other. Such particles of matter we cannot know in their separate or individual state. What we know are objects or bodies formed of them, or congeries of such particles. So long as any body continues to be formed of precisely the individual particles of which it was composed at any given time, and those particles continue in the same relative position, it is precisely the same body or object. This may be called Absolute Identity.

2. A body or congeries or object composed of a certain number of particles may have those particles arranged in one order at one time, and in another order at another time, without any addition or diminution. The same particles may be combined in a definite quantity of water or exist in the state of a definite quantity of gas consisting of uncombined oxygen and hydrogen. Here we have absolute identity of substance but difference of arrangement, and also a consequent difference of relations to other substances. We may denominate

\* In enunciating this platitude, I only follow Bishop Butler, who knew how useful on occasion such identical propositions are as aids to the attainment of something else. "Every thing is," he says, "what it is, and not another thing."—*Preface to Sermons preached at the Rolls' Chapel.*

it Substantial Identity, adding if we please, with Formal Difference.

3. It is a common case that bodies or objects lose some of their particles while they retain the majority of them; or in other words they still continue to consist of the majority of their original particles. More accurately it may be said that the majority of original particles still remain connected so as to form bodies or objects. In such cases we are wont to call the bodies the same, although more or less inaccurately. They are only partially the same. A counter case happens when the body retaining all its particles acquires others; and if these others bear a small proportion to the old ones, we still regard the object as the same.

A scythe may furnish an instance of both events: it loses something in the blade by use and often acquires additional particles by rust; or it may lose a portion or the whole of its handle which may be spliced or be replaced by a new one. In common parlance, nevertheless, it is still (however incorrectly) the same scythe. Here we have what may be appropriately termed, Partial Identity.

4. Organised systems whether animal or vegetable are continually receiving new matter and parting with old: yet every such system is regarded as the same organism so long as what may be called the circuit of organic action is kept up.

In this case the organised being may be said to preserve its Identity, but the Identity is obviously no more than partial: it is strictly neither absolute nor yet substantial identity. The important fact which may be expressed without reference to sameness of substance, is that organic action continues uninterrupted. We may call it Organic Identity.

5. So far I have been speaking of substances, but we apply the term identity to relations or relational facts. Two milestones, for example, are always at the same distance from each other. Two tables or two chairs or two peas (according to the common saying), may continue for a long period to bear the same resemblance to one another as they do now.

The two straight lines in the book before me forming a right angle always preserve to each other the same relative position.

This may be termed Relational Identity.

6. Although every particle has an existence of its own, an individuality, an identity, yet many particles or rather many of the congeries of particles which are all we can perceive, are so much alike, that it is impossible for us to distinguish one from the other: they are alike, that is to say, in knowable or perceptible properties. Hence two objects A and B, which are of course distinct entities, may be composed of equal numbers of particles possessing this exact resemblance and

arranged in precisely similar order; in which case the objects themselves will not be distinguishable by us. Two portions of water for example from the same spring, or two portions of wine from the same bottle, may be so exactly alike that the acutest eye and the nicest taste and even the finest chemical analysis may not be able to discover any difference between them or discriminate one from the other. This is plainly not Identity at all, but Complete Similarity. The same may be said in regard to relations.

7. It is obvious also that as there is such a thing as Partial Identity, so there is Incomplete or Partial Similarity, as for example between two portions of water or of wine differently coloured.

In instances of Complete Similarity and even of high degrees of Partial Similarity we are constantly in the practice of calling the objects between which the resemblance exists, the same. For example, you do not hesitate to say that the wine you are drinking to-day is the same that you drank yesterday — which is convenient and allowable, but obviously not philosophically correct.

8. Under the head of Similarity must be placed repeated acts of the same body. There is, for example, within view of the room in which I am writing a tree waving in the wind. As the wind is steady every motion resembles its predecessor, but we cannot say that it is the same motion.

In these cases of perfectly similar movements,

we do not say that the action or motion is the same, but that it is uniform, meaning that every individual movement is exactly similar to the rest.

Absolute Identity can be predicated only of substances and of certain fixed relations of substances. Every past motion of a particle has of course had an existence, has happened, but must, as an event, be different from any preceding or succeeding motion of the same particle: and so it must be with the motions of any congeries of such particles, or, in other words, with the motions of bodies.

Events may be completely similar one to the other, but no two events can in the nature of the case be the same, although the same agents may be engaged in both.

This proposition is important inasmuch as it applies to acts of consciousness as well as to physical incidents. Whether mental operations are considered to be the functions of physiological organs, or of a spiritual entity, they are things which pass or happen — events which in their very nature cannot last or recur, resembling in that respect all physical movements.

These views, abstract and metaphysically fine as they may appear, are yet capable of some useful applications.

In the first place I have to remark that the great principle of moral or probable or, as I prefer



calling it, contingent reasoning,\* embraces not only identity but similarity.

Not only do I reason that the identical substance or object in my hand, the plummet which I am about to drop into the water, will sink, as I have known it to do formerly; but, when the occasion arises, I infer that another and in fact every plummet which I may chance to handle or to make the subject of thought will do the like. One inference is just as valid as the other.

Reasoning it is manifest would be extremely limited and of comparatively little use, if it did not comprehend cases of similarity as well as of sameness; and accordingly it makes no appreciable difference in the force of an argument whether it is grounded upon complete or partial similarity on the one hand, or upon complete or partial identity on the other.

It is in truth instances of partial similarity which form the great domain of probability, and in proportion as the case *about* which we reason approaches in resemblance the one *from* which we reason, our conclusions are to be relied upon and approximate to certainty.

Again: the exposition of the subject here given may, as it appears to me, assist us to solve the difficulties which have arisen regarding Personal

\* For the considerations on which this preference is founded I must take the liberty of referring to a former work, "The Theory of Reasoning."

Identity, and which have exercised the sagacity of many distinguished philosophers.

The phrase Personal Identity seems applied by custom to human beings alone, and what it denotes is generally considered to be maintained in any man so long as the circuit of organic action is kept up. In simpler language, so long as he is living, he is considered without any other condition to be the same man, or the same person.

John Thompson in a trance during which all consciousness seemed to be suspended would still be considered as John Thompson — as personally the same being. Thomas Johnson lying in a state of complete insensibility from drowning would be regarded as Thomas Johnson just in the same way as he would be after he had been resuscitated.

In these cases we see that Personal Identity is considered to continue so long as Organic Identity continues, even when the organism is without consciousness.

John Thompson is the same person whether he is in a trance or stupor, or has all his faculties about him, because there is kept up in his body the same circuit of organic action—he lives.

This is I think a correct statement of the way in which the phrase is employed, or would be employed if uniform consistency of language were maintained.

It may still be possibly objected that consciousness

is essential to Personal Identity; that the latter cannot, indeed, be said to have place without Identity of Consciousness.

Nothing however can be clearer, as I have shown, than that Personal Identity remains, although Consciousness is absent. Such at all events is the way in which the phrase is generally applied: and if consciousness may be absent, identity of consciousness whatever is implied by it cannot be essential.

But, what is identity of consciousness? In what sense can consciousness be said to continue the same?

Surely nothing in the world is more variable. There cannot be a more diversified succession of events than the operations and feelings and affections that follow each other in human beings, and constitute what is meant by consciousness; or, to express it in other terms, constitute its phases. So far from any sameness existing, even in appearance, there is perpetual change.

In addition to these considerations, there is the conclusive one before explained, that every phenomenon of consciousness is an event, a function in fact of some substance corporeal or spiritual; and that events however alike they may be, are never the same; so that on this ground identity cannot be predicated of consciousness.

But then, it may be said, this view of the subject entirely overlooks the identity of the mind, or of

the soul, which is surely an element in personal identity.

With regard to identity of mind, all that this term implies has just been discussed under the head of identity of consciousness, and I may pass on to the allegation of having omitted to consider the identity of the soul as included in personal identity.

I have most certainly omitted it, because it appears to me to be of some importance on any theory to discriminate and keep them separate, although the question is for the most part a question as to the application of words, the difference between the things themselves being acknowledged or admitted.

According to the general belief, that there is within the human organization a spiritual substance or entity distinct from it, spiritual identity must necessarily be different from organic identity, and must consist in that substance continuing the same whether in or out of the body—whether connected or disconnected with the organization. It is in fact a case of substantial identity.

The question then is, whether it would be more expedient to include this Spiritual Identity in the term Personal, which would make Personal Identity to consist in Organic Identity *plus* Spiritual Identity; or, whether it would be better to consider it as consisting in Organic Identity alone?

On both methods there would be no longer any thing after death to which the phrase could be applied. Organic Identity being terminated, the Personal Identity which it either constituted or helped to constitute, would also be at an end and only Spiritual Identity left.

It seems simpler then to let the latter have its own distinctive name throughout.

Besides, to the materialist who does not acknowledge a separate spiritual substance or entity, Personal Identity is a fact as clear as to the spiritualist, and this of itself is sufficient to show the inexpediency of mixing up Spiritual Identity with it under one name.

On this subject of personal identity much controversy seems to have arisen from a confusion of two distinct things—fact and knowledge.

The fact of personal identity is one thing: the kind and degree of knowledge we may, in any case, have of it is another.

What constitutes the identity of ourselves exactly corresponds with what constitutes the identity of other human beings; but the knowledge that we have of our own personal identity is evidently different in kind from the knowledge that we have of the personal identity of our neighbours.

We of necessity know our own existence as soon as we are conscious, and we know our own

personal identity as soon as we have experienced two consecutive feelings, or two consecutive events of consciousness, the first of which we recollect; for as identity implies the existence of some individual entity not only at a certain time but also at some other time, we cannot employ the term in regard to either ourselves or others without reference to at least two periods.

Hence recollection is essential to the knowledge of our own personal identity. They manifestly imply each other. The recollection of an event implies, of course, that the reminiscient knows himself to be the same being as he was when the event happened; and the knowledge of his own identity implies the remembrance of a former occurrence. Our knowledge of the personal identity of our neighbour is evidently on a different footing. It is simply perceiving him to be the same organized being at one time as at another; or, in different language, recollecting having perceived him at a former period. For as in the case of self-knowledge, this also implies two periods and presupposes recollection on our part. We cannot in any sense know him for the same person unless we remember him. It is requisite to remark, however, that although recollection is essentially necessary to the knowledge of identity in both cases, it is not essential to the thing in either case. My not recollecting any one makes no difference in his

identity; and as to myself, were I no longer to recollect a single past event, which I had taken part in or witnessed, I should still continue to be personally the same being.

Recollection implies or proves but does not constitute personal identity. Our great countryman Locke undoubtedly fell into the error of making Personal Identity consist in recollection alone, and this arose fundamentally, I think, from not allowing due weight to the distinction, which I have here attempted to explain, between the thing and the knowledge of it; and hence failing to discern or to keep in sight, that while remembrance is necessary to the latter, it has nothing to do with the former. Not seeing this he launched into much verbal controversy. Locke's disquisition on this subject, nevertheless, is both acute and profound; and it has been well observed by Dr. Thos. Brown, that his paradoxes are most of them logical consequences of the definition of "person" from which he sets out. Grant him his own peculiar acceptation of the term, and you must concur in nearly all the very eccentric inferences which he seems almost to take a pleasure, on account of their eccentricity, in drawing from it. He was, indeed, half conscious that he was mainly engaged on a question of terminology.

But the errors of Locke on Personal Identity

have been so well elucidated by the Scottish philosophers as to render any comments from me superfluous. M. Cousin following in their wake, also brings some good objections against the doctrine in question, but expressed loosely and tinged, as his psychological disquisitions usually are, with unsound philosophy.



## LETTER III.

## CAUSATION.

OF all the subjects which have perplexed human speculation few have proved more difficult to deal with than that of cause and effect.

Although it has been discussed by some of our acutest and profoundest philosophers, there is still an obscurity about it exceedingly annoying to the young inquirer.

In venturing on the attempt to clear away a portion of this obscurity, I am encouraged by the consideration that I may be able to bring to bear upon the subject some of the principles which I have already explained, so as to present it in a partially different aspect from that in which it has been generally regarded.

Putting aside language as far as practicable, let us think of some instances of connected events, the more familiar the better.

A lady touches a key of her piano, and draws forth the note c: a miller turns the stream upon his wheel and thereby sets it in motion: a boy drops a stone into the brook and it immediately forms

concentric circles on the surface of the water: a secretary who has been writing despatches, presses a seal on some wax, and by so doing makes the figure engraved on the seal appear in relief on the outside of the letters.

Each of these cases presents us with a human act performed on a material substance; but it will equally serve the purpose if we take instances of mere physical action such as are expressed in the propositions the fire consumes the paper; the stream turns the wheel of the mill; the carbonic acid in the well extinguishes the candle.

All these are events which are perceived through the organs of sense. No one doubts that he sees the fire consume the paper thrown into it, or that he sees the stream turn the wheel on which it impinges.

Having witnessed such incidents as these, I find that they afterwards recur to my mind; I think about them or recollect them: in other words I have ideas of them.

What I have perceived and recollect, I have or may have frequent occasion to describe; and for this purpose I employ names, some of which are proper and some are common. In describing the incidents above given as examples, I have used such names as are of the latter kind. Both the nouns and the verbs are common or general terms: but I might have substituted proper nouns in some of the sentences; instead of saying a boy drops a

stone into a brook, I might for instance have said "Harry Smith drops the marble which his brother gave him into the brook near my house:" where the boy and the stone dropped and the stream into which it fell are designated in language which by its own quality or by particular combination becomes proper in contradistinction to common.

I might also have employed *more* general terms to describe the events. I might have said the stream causes the wheel to turn; the touch of the lady's finger causes the key to sound the note c; the flame causes the destruction of the paper; the dropping of the stone into the brook causes concentric circles in the water.

Mark, however, that nothing is added in point of fact and nothing more described or expressed or indicated by the substitution of the more general for the less general term, except a resemblance to a wider range of facts, while there is of course a loss in particular significance.\*

It is convenient to have a term which we can use in respect of all the operations mentioned; which can be applied to eliciting a note from the piano, to making circles in the water, to consuming paper, and to extinguishing flame. In each of these cases there is one thing giving rise to another, there is a cause producing an effect, whether we

\* In logical phrase the substituted term is greater in comprehension but less in extension than the one which it displaces.

describe the events which take place in terms less general or more general.

Here then we have before us, (1) Events perceived\* to give rise to other events: (2) Ideas of those events: (3) Words of more or less generality to describe them.

What more do we want, and where is there any difficulty in the whole matter?

It may doubtless be said "So far all is well, but besides the three circumstances enumerated, the idea of causality or causation has sprung up in the mind and the great difficulty is to account for it or to show how we come by it."

This difficulty has I conceive been already met in a former letter, in which I showed that we have no idea of causation over and above the ideas of individual causes and effects: that these individual causes and effects are what we in the first place actually perceive when no "idea" is in question, and they are all we subsequently think of or can think of: or in other words all of which we can have ideas.

If any inquirer will only resort to his own consciousness instead of illuding himself by 'looking "through the spectacles of books," and ascertain what really passes in his mind when the word causation is used, or when he uses it himself, he

\* The reader will please to bear in mind that I employ the word perceive to denote exclusively the act of discerning or observing through the organs of the senses.

will find that in his clearest mental state all that he is conscious of, are representative conceptions of individual objects or events in the act of producing others. Should he try to attach a precise meaning to the word, he must think of particular instances. If this statement is correct, we get quit of all those perplexing questions as to the idea of causation and its origin, which Hume with all his acuteness and vigour proved himself impotent to solve.

We also get quit of the kindred inquiry "In what does causation consist?" but only to find the substance of it re-appear in a different form, namely, what is the common circumstance, or attribute, or quality, on account of which so many various objects or events are designated by the term cause? or to express it in other language, are classed under that category?

You will probably be startled and will think me dealing in paradoxes or in identical propositions, when I say, in answer to this inquiry, that the common circumstance cannot be better expressed than by the term cause itself or its paronymes; and that when we attempt to express it in any other way we only vary our language and ring changes on synonymous phrases.

The common circumstance in all causes is "causing." I may diversify the expression by saying it is "producing an effect," or "effecting a change," or "operating upon an object," or "giving rise to

an event," or "modifying a substance:" but in all this I am merely substituting equivalent expressions which themselves present the same difficulty, if difficulty there really is, as the original phrase which they replace.

If any one for example should make the inquiry what is the common circumstance or attribute on account of which one thing is said "to operate upon another," I can resort only to the same mode of reply.

I can as in the case of "causing" above elucidated, answer the inquiry only by equivalent phrases. I may say that a thing operates upon another when it produces a change in it, or alters it, or effects a modification in it, but by employing such phrases I should in reality be no nearer satisfying the question. It must be borne in mind that the inquiry is something different from asking the meaning of the expression. Should the inquirer wish to know simply what the phrase means, I should have no difficulty in replying to him. I should not need to do more than adduce particular incidents of the kind denoted by the expression; I might point to the sun warming the garden-wall, or the hot water in the tea-cup melting the sugar, or the wind turning the vane on the top of the house; which are all examples of one body operating on another and would suffice to convey my meaning.

So in the case of the kindred phrase "causing"

I cannot assign the common quality or property except by using equivalent expressions; but if you desire to know simply the meaning of the term, I can satisfy your inquiry by directing your attention to the flame of the taper liquefying the wax with which I am sealing a letter, or to the impression made by the seal on the melted substance, or a hundred other familiar instances of cause and effect which would at once put you in possession of the signification of the word.

And this is the furthest point that any one can reach; the utmost he can accomplish in the way of explanation. He may resort to equivalent phrases, or he may adduce individual examples. He can do no more.

This doctrine will I am aware be strenuously objected to at the first glance, not only by those who at once reject without examination everything not obviously consonant with their indurated prejudices, but even by those who may be disposed to bestow upon it due consideration. They may urge "we give a common name to two or more things because they resemble each other, and surely the circumstance or point in which they resemble each other may be assigned." Undoubtedly it may, but the question, according to what I have already said, is can it be assigned in any other way than by using the common name itself or an equivalent term?

In addition to the reply above given, — virtually

at least,—to this objection, let us test the soundness of it on the one hand and of the doctrine against which it is levelled on the other by taking some other simple instance of a common quality, and we cannot select a better one than a simple colour: let it be *red*.

We doubtless apply the common epithet *red* to the poppy and to the geranium because they resemble each other in a certain visible attribute or property.

But if you ask me to assign the particular property or circumstance or point or attribute in which they resemble each other I will not say they are alike in colour for that would be an evasion; I can answer only that they are alike in being "*red*," in having a red colour. It is an ultimate fact that I perceive them to be similar in a certain visible respect which I designate by the epithet "*red*," and the inquiry is at an end.

Precisely in the same way I call the fire when scorching a piece of paper and the water when melting a lump of sugar or turning a wheel, by the common name cause, on account of their resembling each other in the circumstance of producing results. I call them causes for doing what I cannot better express than by the word causing.

Beyond this I am not able to go.

Each of these compared cases is an instance of calling a thing by a common name on account of a circumstance or property or attribute expressed by



the common name better, or at least not worse, than by any other: and in each case the circumstance or attribute is a perceived object, and in relation to thought or reasoning or speculation, it is an ultimate fact. Objectors to this statement would seem to require *two* names for the common property, but even in the event of finding a second one, they would be no nearer the end.

To show the truth of the doctrine in question still more plainly let us take the very basis of all classification and (inclusively) of all imposition of general names, resemblance.

A portrait and the person whom it was painted to represent are seen together and the spectator discerns that the one has a peculiar relation to the other: two mountains are perceived in the distance both of which are peaked and blue: two pillars are observed to support a building, both of the Corinthian order.

In each of these instances we discern two things to resemble each other; and we further discern that the pairs, as we may call them, do themselves resemble one another in the fact that the two individual members of each pair mutually resemble. A resembles B, C resembles D, E resembles F; and moreover the pairs AB, CD, and EF are analogous to each other in being resembling pairs.

Now to the objector who should want me to point out the common circumstances on account

of which the name "cause" is given to the fire when scorching paper, and to the water when melting salt, I would say point out to me the common circumstance on account of which resemblance is said to exist in each pair of things in the above three cases, and also between the three pairs.

What is that which leads us to affirm in regard to the individual members of the pairs, and in regard to the pairs themselves, "these things resemble each other"?

What is the circumstance or respect or point or property which forms the ground of the assertion?

The only thing that leads us to say so, the only ground on which we make the assertion, is the resemblance itself. We *say* they are like because they *are* like. That phrase expresses precisely the whole fact.

We have reached the extreme length of our speculative and of our expositive tether.

We come in this case to one of those primary facts beyond which it is, in the nature of the case, impossible to go.

All that can be said is that we are so constituted as to perceive that things resemble one another.

So we perceive objects to be equal or near or opposite to each other, as well as a multitude of other relational facts — facts in which two objects at the least must bear a part, and which, if we wish to express in language, we must resort for

that purpose to definite phrases not resolvable into others more significant.

It is just the same with "causing" as with "resembling": they are both general terms expressive of primary facts or circumstances of a relational character which we directly perceive.

Undoubtedly the generality of philosophers would explain or state the matter differently. They would bring in their general or abstract or simple ideas, to which I have already referred, and say that when we see a cause producing an effect, we not only see the sight but we have also the idea of causation or causality engendered in the mind. When they are asked, nevertheless, whether they ever have the idea of causation clearly distinct and separate from the perception or conception of some individual cause, they must be perplexed to return any but a negative answer, and a negative answer would be surrendering at discretion; it would at once admit the alleged idea of causation to be supererogatory or more correctly speaking to be a nullity.

For my own part, on scrutinizing my personal consciousness in every possible way, and especially the effects produced on it by general and abstract terms, I can find no such idea as causation; or, to speak with greater precision, I have not any idea in my mind corresponding to that abstract term, either when I am actually perceiving causes and effects or merely conceiving them; nor do I think

of any thing when the words are used but individual events, specific instances of a cause producing an effect.

Besides, were this abstract idea of causation or causality upon which you insist to be admitted as an actual mental entity, I cannot see that it would carry us beyond the limit where I have shown that our knowledge and our speculations must stop. It would not advance the solution of the difficulty which presents itself to those inquirers who ask in what does causation consist.

It might still be demanded why is the idea of causation for which you contend raised up by, or attached to, or conferred upon, instances so widely at variance, in almost every respect, with each other as those which I have enumerated: and the answer must be, virtually if not formally, that which I have given.

There is still another consideration which is worth briefly adverting to.

If the perception of a cause producing an effect raises up as alleged the idea of causation or causingness *plus* the perception we have of cause and effect, an analogous phenomenon must be allowed to take place when we turn expressly to more particular cases (which are in truth all that are possible). The perception of fire burning wood must raise up the idea of burningness *plus* the sight of the fire consuming the wood. And so in every case: when water melts the sugar in your tea-cup,

or wets your coat, or quenches your thirst, you must have the idea of meltingness, or wettingness, or quenchingness, over and above the actual perception of one or other of those several operations.

Indeed these more particular ideas, if such things come into the mind at all, must precede the more general idea of causation; for which in good sooth it is not easy to find or fancy either a *hora natalis* or a *nidus* to be born in.

We can witness the action of one particular thing upon another but we cannot witness a cause producing an effect generally or abstractedly. There is no general or abstract entity called a cause bringing about another general or abstract entity called an effect; and if consequently the idea of causation, as contended for, arise at all, it must do so on some of the above described particular occasions, along with the more limited idea appropriate to the case; and thus there would be both a generic and a specific idea springing out of the same causal event besides the representative idea left in the mind by the event itself when it was passed.

For example, in the case of a lighted taper melting your sealing wax, there would on this theory be the following ideas in your mind, besides your perceiving through your sense of sight what took place:

1. The simple or abstract idea of meltingness:

2. The simple or abstract idea of causingness:
3. The representative idea of the event after it had happened.

Those philosophers who maintain the doctrine of simple ideas merely (if any such there are) would be in a greater difficulty than those who maintain that of abstract ideas. On the former doctrine it is not easy to see how the ideas of meltingness and causingness could both be generated; but on the latter doctrine the idea of meltingness would be first abstracted from the concrete event, and then the idea of causingness would be abstracted from the idea of meltingness by a still higher process.

In such difficulties and incongruities are we landed by the doctrines of simple and abstract ideas in the matter of causation.

The plain and intelligible view which I have maintained extricates us from the embarrassment or rather prevents us from falling into it; namely, that in the case of a directly perceptible event, we perceive the cause producing the effect, and that the event so perceived bounds the consequent idea which represents it; or, in other words, the event is all that is or can be represented by the idea in its utmost possible completeness.

## LETTER IV.

CAUSATION (*continued*).

IN the preceding letter I purposely confined my remarks to instances of causation which are directly perceived, which are the immediate subjects of observation through our organs of sense.

We see that the flame of the candle melts the sealing wax, and that the seal makes an impression on the melted substance; we see and hear that the touch of the lady's finger elicits the note from the piano; we feel that the sun gives warmth to the bodies exposed to his rays.

But besides the immense number of events constantly flowing from causes which we directly perceive in the very act of producing them, there are other events which we can only *infer* to be produced by certain causes; and there are causes which we can only infer to be productive of certain effects.

To take a familiar example, we do not perceive, we only infer that the moon causes the tides. We see the moon on the meridian, it is true, and we see the tide perhaps rising at the same time; but that one causes the other is a matter of inference

requiring a great number of observations and many nice calculations to prove it.

Thus instances of causation naturally fall into two classes :

1. Instances of causation which we directly discern as such.

2. Instances of causation which we do not directly discern as such but which are the subjects of proof: in other words, events occurring in sequence or simultaneously which are determined by evidence to be causally connected: *i.e.* connected as those causes and effects are which we directly perceive. What we infer in this way can never go beyond the objects of direct perception.

Now one of the characteristics which we observe to belong to such instances of causation as we directly perceive, when we come to make them the subjects of comparison and reflection, is the invariableness of the operation. We observe when we compare numerous cases that a certain cause has always produced a certain effect.

It is obviously impossible for us to perceive this invariableness in a single instance, or in other words to perceive it from a cause once producing an effect; for the simple reason that it is a relation which can have place only amongst a number of instances. We may perceive a cause producing an effect without reference to any other similar event, but to perceive it *invariably* produce an effect, we must witness a number of similar events. Hence



although we expect similar results from similar causes, it is only on comparison and reflection that we come to consider invariable sequence or concomitance as a universal characteristic of the causes and effects which are subject to our direct perception; and it then becomes an important criterion in the determination of the causal connexion of events in cases where that connexion is not directly perceptible but is to be established by proof.

When a cause produces an effect before our eyes, no proof of the connexion between them is required either from invariableness or from any thing else: but when two successive or contemporaneous\* phenomena cannot be directly perceived to be cause and effect, when, for example, they are separated by distance in space or in time, the invariableness of the sequence is indispensable, as every one admits, to the proof of a causal connexion between them. If the tides did not invariably rise when the moon was in a certain relative position in regard to that part of the earth where they once rose, they could not be concluded to be the effect of that luminary.

But although invariableness of sequence or of

\* I say contemporaneous to include causes which operate continuously, so that the effects or some of them appear simultaneous with the causes; but for the purpose in hand, it is not needful to bring into view any but successive events, and it simplifies the discussion to leave out the others which may be assumed to be always tacitly included.

concomitance is indispensable to the proof of a causal connexion in such cases, it is not of itself sufficient to establish one, for the plain reason that it is an attribute of other sequences besides those of cause and effect. There are many phenomena taking place in succession with unbroken uniformity, without any causal dependence of the one on the other.

Amongst such may be mentioned joint effects of the same cause, or the same combination of causes, which are not always even simultaneous but precede and follow each other; as the flash and the report from a piece of artillery. The flash is the invariable antecedent but not the cause of the report. Other cases too abound of a different character.

In any given tune the notes follow each other in a succession which must be strictly observed, otherwise the tune is marred or rather prevented; but although to produce the tune they must follow each other in a certain order, or, if you prefer the phrase, in an invariable sequence, one note does not cause another; the first has nothing to do with producing its successor the second. Each note is proximately the effect of a definite number of vibrations in a string or other sonorous body, and not of the preceding note.

Hence invariableness of sequence, although it is indispensably requisite, cannot be held sufficient of itself to establish a causal connexion.

In the case of the moon and the tides, the now undisputed conclusion that one is the cause of the other, could not have been confidently drawn unless philosophers had been able, not only to show that the phenomena concerned take place invariably, but to account for them by the law of gravitation: *i.e.*, in truth, to show that the phenomena are analogous to instances of causation which we directly perceive. Otherwise the connexion between the moon and the tides would have been much in the same logical position as the uniformity of colour which led to the conclusion formerly prevailing that all swans were white.

Every case of *inferred* causal connexion must be analogous to cases which we *directly perceive*.

Thus there are two points to be noted in respect to invariableness of succession:

1. It is characteristic of other sequences beside those of cause and effect.

2. It is not included in the fact of a single cause producing an effect, nor of course in our perception of the fact.

Causation, therefore, is not the same thing as invariable succession.

Dr. Thos. Brown, who was a very able metaphysician, and in many respects an admirable writer, although too easily satisfied with his own speculations on points requiring protracted study and repeated examination, overlooked several of

the considerations which I have presented to you in the preceding remarks.

In his celebrated "Inquiry into the Relation of Cause and Effect," the most elaborate and most carefully digested of his philosophical writings, he strenuously contends that causes are nothing but invariable antecedents, and that effects are nothing but invariable consequents. He says that to assert A to be the cause of B is the same thing as to assert A to be the invariable antecedent of B; and, conversely, to assert B to be the effect of A is the same thing as to assert B to be the invariable consequent of A. One proposition he contends affirms as much and no more than the other. To determine the truth of this doctrine let us look at a few obvious facts.

When it is affirmed that two propositions are identical or equivalent, the assertion is that the fact expressed in one is the same as the fact expressed in the other; that they are merely two modes of stating one fact.

Let us then take a single case of causation: I strike the table at which I am seated, and the stroke makes a sound.

According to my own view a cause here produces an effect, a stroke causes a sound, or to express it conversely, for the convenience of Dr. Brown's argument, a sound is the effect of a stroke; and I perceive it to be so. I perceive a

cause operate and an effect follow. According to Dr. Brown this is precisely the same thing as the sound *invariably* following the stroke. Nothing more is contained in one description than in the other.

Assuredly, however, the two propositions are altogether different. One proposition asserts only the happening of a pair of successive events without reference to any thing else: while the other proposition asserts a relation between one pair of successive events and other pairs of successive events.

An instance of causation may take place and be perceived as such unaccompanied by any connexion with any other similar instance; it is complete in itself; whereas by the very force of the terms, or rather in the very nature of the case, more instances than one must occur to make it true that a certain event is in those instances (not to speak of all possible instances) uniformly followed by a certain other event. Applied to a single pair of successive events, without reference to any others, the designation "invariable sequence" has no meaning, while to style one member of the pair "the cause of the other" has a signification obvious and complete in itself.

Perhaps this argument may be rendered clearer by considering the several relations which may be discriminated as concerned in the question.

The connexion of cause and effect is one rela-

tion: the succession of events is another relation: and invariableness of succession is a third.

1. That one event is the cause of another is clearly a relational fact which is complete in a single instance, as I have shown, and is directly so perceived. The whole case is, so to speak, in presence. The stroke falls on the table before our eyes and we hear the sound occasioned by it. The causal connexion is perfect in itself without reference to any analogous events.

2. That one event follows another, is also a relational fact, which is complete in a single instance, as well as perceived to be so, just as in the case of causation.

3. That one event *invariably* follows another is a third relational fact; but so far from the relation of invariableness being one which can have place in a single instance like the relations in the other cases 1 and 2, it manifestly cannot subsist except between several instances.

A stroke produces a sound in a single case as completely as in a thousand cases, but it would be absurd to speak of a sound *invariably* following the stroke in a single case without reference to any other. More instances than one being thus self-evidently required for this relation of invariableness to subsist, a curious consequence results from the doctrine under review. Since that doctrine teaches invariable sequence to be the same thing as causal connexion, it logically follows that a

single pair of successive events cannot by themselves be cause and effect: to become so they must wait till other similar sequences have happened, and then having emerged from their solitary state they with the rest assume a causal connexion, not in their own right but in virtue of the uniformity of succession amongst the whole.

If Dr. Brown had simply maintained that causing and being caused are nothing more than preceding and following, and that the proposition "A causes B" expresses no more than the proposition "A precedes B," he would not have exposed himself to the criticism just brought against his actual doctrine. It is a possible and on a first glance even a plausible proposition that there is nothing and that we can perceive nothing in a cause producing an effect but one event preceding another. But he was too perspicacious not to see, that causation is only one kind of sequence, that numerous other events which no one can mistake for causes and effects also respectively precede and follow. Discerning, then, that causes and effects are something besides mere sequences, he thought he had found this something in invariableness of succession, not adverting to the obvious fact that this circumstance can have place only when there are more instances of sequence than one; and therefore can have nothing to do with constituting the causal character of the individual sequences amongst

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which the relation of invariableness comes to subsist.

I come back then to the doctrine already maintained that our perceiving a cause produce an effect, as for example, the flame of a taper melt sealing wax, is a primal fact which we cannot express more simply, just as our perceiving that one rose resembles another is a primal fact not to be more plainly or directly enunciated in language.



## LETTER V.

## EVIDENCE.

THERE is one important subject on which I hold some opinions difficult, I fear, to make as plain to you as they are to myself, but which you have frequently intimated you are anxious to learn — I mean the subject of evidence.

To clear the way, I must premise the obvious truth that there are two classes of facts more requisite than easy to distinguish, facts we know and facts we receive on evidence: in other words, facts discerned or felt, and facts inferred.

All that we can be strictly said to know are the mental affections of which we are conscious and the external objects which we personally perceive. Every thing else we learn from evidence and can learn by no other means.

Things thus known in the strictest sense of the expression, may be termed *primitive* facts; and *direct* evidence may be briefly defined as consisting in these primitive facts adduced to prove other facts.

Facts which have been themselves proved may be termed *derivative* or *secondary*, and when

they in turn are made use of as proofs they constitute what may be denominated *indirect* evidence.

If we exclude from consideration mathematical and other demonstrative proofs which as being of a distinct character I purpose to omit in the following exposition, the definition of direct evidence may be stated thus: direct evidence consists in a fact or facts personally known to us employed to prove, or engaged in the function of proving, that some other fact not known, has taken place, is taking place, or will take place.

To some persons it may appear proper to limit the term evidence to the proofs of past events, but the inconvenience unavoidably arising from the repetition and prolixity consequent on such a restriction, would more than counterbalance the advantage gained by it. It would also be contrary to custom. For example, it is very common to speak of the evidence for a future state, or for the approaching appearance and probable track, in the heavens, of a comet.

When either primitive or derivative facts are brought to prove other facts, the operation may be styled either *discerning and adducing evidence*\* (in shorter phrase employing evidence), or *reasoning*.

\* Discerning when we are engaged in silent thought, and both discerning and adducing when we are addressing ourselves to others.

It seems to be very commonly overlooked that these two processes are identical, or rather that the two phrases are different descriptions of the same process.

Facts adduced as evidence are the premises from which we draw a conclusion ; and their being employed as evidence implies that they are adduced for the sake of establishing the conclusion.

The identity of these two processes needs to be pressed upon the attention, since it is altogether lost sight of by those writers who while they very properly and legitimately insist upon the evidences for the existence and attributes of a Deity and for the truth of revelation, are at the same time inconsistent enough to speak in the most disparaging and even contemptuous terms of "poor human reason." That miserable faculty being, however, a mere figure of speech, their contempt falls in reality on the very process of employing evidence in which they are so zealously engaged. They are decrying their own task. Nay more. They are with busy earnestness actually sawing off from the bole of the tree the identical branch on which they have seated themselves.

If, as their vituperation of weak human reason implies, we human beings are so constituted as to be incompetent, inefficient, and imbecile in dealing with evidence or drawing inferences from the facts presented to us, or rather if that process itself is fallacious and not to be trusted, why do these

writers who can pretend to no exemption from the failings and feebleness of our common nature, pour forth their confessedly wretched attempts at attaining truth by inference or deduction, into the ears of those who partake of the same logical incapacity ?

If they are to be taken at their word, they are at the best engaged in nothing better than

“ — the toil  
Of dropping buckets into empty wells,  
And growing old in drawing nothing up.”

The course of the writers here alluded to, well exemplifies the evils arising from the personification of mental operations. If reasoning had not been spoken of as a faculty and if that faculty had not subsequently been personified, or erected into a separate entity, such futile invectives could not have been put forth. No reasoner would have been weak enough to directly disparage the process itself.

Further it is important to have a full and clear apprehension, while considering the two classes of facts above described, primitive facts and derivative facts, that the former do not admit of evidence at all; they are not susceptible of proof; or, in other words, they are not the subjects of inference. If direct evidence consists in known or primitive facts adduced to prove facts not actually known, the former class, it is plain, cannot themselves be the subjects of evidence.

Thus all our own mental states and conditions,

operations and affections, our sensations, emotions, acts of perceiving, of reasoning, of recollecting, of willing, are things felt or done or experienced by us; they are facts known to us, primitive facts; and they neither require nor admit of evidence or proof to us who experience them.

This truth holds good of, or more correctly speaking comprehends, our perceiving external objects. That I see the trees and the grass and the flowers in the landscape before me, is to me a primitive fact which is not susceptible of proof or evidence. I know it.

The employment of evidence has thus nothing to do with primitive facts; it is legitimately confined to showing either that some event has happened or is happening although unperceived by us, or that some event will happen, which therefore must be equally unperceived.

When any one attempts to prove the existence of objects actually present to our senses, or more precisely speaking perceived through the organs of sense, he falls (on the most favorable supposition) into the absurdity of adducing known facts to prove others equally known; and when he attempts on the other hand to prove the non-existence of such objects the self-contradiction, as I have shown elsewhere, if not equally manifest is not less real.\*

\* See Letters on the Philosophy of the Human Mind, First Series, p. 140, and Second Series, p. 132.

These conclusions seem almost too simple to require pointing out, yet they have been so utterly overlooked that philosophers in crowds have endeavoured to prove and others to disprove that we perceive external objects.

If they had duly reflected on the nature of evidence, they would have discerned the absolute futility of all such attempts.

Evidence having been thus shown to consist in known or already proved facts adduced to prove other facts, the next step is to consider in what property of the facts or the evidence the force of the proof lies; or, in different language, how some facts become or are fitted to become the proofs of other facts.

All facts it is plain cannot prove other facts indiscriminately. For one fact to have the capability of proving another there must be a connexion between the facts themselves or the classes of facts to which they belong.

This connexion is that of either causation or concomitance.

All facts adduced as evidence are and must be either causes or effects or concomitant circumstances.

When Robinson Crusoe (if I may resort to an example from fiction) was startled at seeing a foot-print on the sand in his solitary island, he instantly inferred that it had been made by a human being passing over the beach.

This was reasoning from the effect to the cause, or, to put the matter the other way, the print on the sand was evidence to him of the cause which had produced it — of the recent transit of a man.

On the other hand, should any one seeing a boat's crew about to land on the beach, predict from a previous knowledge of the consistence of the sand that they would leave their foot-prints upon it, he would reason from the cause to the effect, and the evidence to his mind would be facts before experienced of an analogous character.

In regard to the second kind of connexion, when concomitant facts like those here referred to are such as are always found together (for some facts are, I scarcely need to say, only casually conjoined) one is the evidence of the other just as in the case of causal succession, but to make them equal to the latter as proofs, they must be joint results of the same cause. Thus the fall of the mercury in a thermometer to zero, or to a certain point above it, and the freezing of the neighbouring pond, are concomitant effects of a great abstraction of heat from the atmosphere; and on seeing the state of the thermometer we may infer the state of the pond without taking the trouble of going to look at it. The state of the thermometer is not the cause of the state of the pond, nor, conversely, is the latter the cause of the former; they are concomitant results of one cause and serve to prove each other.

These are doubtless trite and simple facts and explanations, but since they lie in the course of the argument, their triteness and simplicity do not diminish their importance.

Having thus shown the nature of the connexion between facts by which they become, or may become, evidence of each other, I will proceed to point out the limitations of this function.

At the first glance it is obvious that any given cause does not produce all sorts of effects but one precise effect, and from that particular cause, consequently, it is only that precise effect which can be inferred. The converse equally holds.

Thus we are limited in our inferences to similar cases of causation.

If we have seen A produce B at one time we can infer when we meet with it again, that it will again produce B: we cannot infer that it will produce C.

From no cause can we infer legitimately a future effect unless we have known directly or indirectly a similar cause produce a similar effect to that which we infer; and the same truth holds *mutatis mutandis* when from effects we infer past causes and past concomitant events the results of the same cause.

To put the matter the other way, we can have no evidence that an effect will happen from an assigned cause unless we have known similar effects to have happened from causes similar to



that assigned: or, more correctly speaking, an assigned cause cannot be evidence to us of the future event without the knowledge described. When for example, a copper rod is fixed to a church steeple to guard it from the stroke of the lightning, there can be no ground for expecting the rod to protect the building except the experience that the electric fluid in the atmosphere has been conveyed harmless into the earth by similar metallic conductors.

So with regard to the past: we can have no evidence that an effect has been produced by an assigned cause unless we have known similar effects produced by similar causes; or again more correctly, the effect cannot without that knowledge be to us evidence that the cause has been in operation.

The shattered spire is proof to us that the lightning has struck it, only because we have witnessed or known or learned indirectly similar instances of destruction from similar strokes of the electric fluid.

The truth that we can infer none but events similar to those which we already know, whether the events inferred are causes, effects, or concomitant results, may be said in a certain sense to be comprehended in another truth formerly insisted upon, namely that we can conceive nothing or think of nothing but such objects or events (how differently soever arranged) as we have previously

perceived or been conscious of: but our inferences are obviously much more limited than our conceptions; we must be able to conceive all that we infer but we cannot infer all that we can conceive, but only, as before said, such facts as are similar to those which we have known to be connected by causation or concomitance with the facts from which we reason.

By separation and combination of known objects and events, we may create in imagination scenes and incidents more beautiful and interesting, vaster and more sublime, of greater splendour and magnificence, than any experienced realities; but for our being able to infer that these will at some future period take place, we must know that there are causes at present in operation analogous to those which have in past times produced similar scenes and incidents.

Here doubtless an objection may naturally be raised. It may be said by some of my readers, "we may be told that events will take place at some future period transcending our experience, and surely we are right on sufficient authority in looking forward to them, although bearing no resemblance to any thing in the past or the present."

Doubtless on sufficient authority you are; but it is needful to bear in mind, (1) that you can comprehend them only so far as you have known like events, if not in their combination at least in their elements. The tether that ties you here is

perfectly definite. You must also bear in mind, (2) that the evidence you have for such events is the telling, *i.e.* the testimony or rather the prediction of human beings; and the telling or the prediction must be such in quality and circumstances as you have always found to be trustworthy, always found to announce no events but such as have subsequently happened. The same principles are applicable *mutatis mutandis* to any narrative of past events. Thus testimony is brought within the same principles as all other facts when they become evidence.

This limitation of possible inferences to similar cases may be applied to the doctrine, already mentioned, of those metaphysicians who contend that we *infer* the existence of an external world from our own sensations which are caused by it; and if I mistake not it will exhibit a striking phase of that error.

If it is true, as I have shown, that in order to be able to infer any facts of causation, we must have known similar facts, *i.e.* both the causes and the effects as connected, it follows that to be able to infer the existence of the external world from our own sensations we must have known a similar world, and known it too as causing similar sensations: otherwise no inference is possible from one to the other.

From this preposterous conclusion which strictly follows from the premises we have no refuge but

in the truth or primal fact that we directly perceive the external world. It is impossible that we can infer it. Its existence cannot be what is styled in the loose language of some philosophers "a conclusion of the reason"; it is a fact which we know, and which is consequently beyond the province of reasoning.

It may appear that the limits here traced circumscribe too strictly the range of philosophical speculation. The question, however, is not whether the limits assigned are narrow, but whether they are the true boundaries of legitimate inference. Doubtless it is unpleasant to discover some of our brilliant dreams to be mere dreams; to find ourselves tied down to facts alike in our retrospective conclusions and in our anticipations of what is to come; and to be fettered by restraints which have been wisely submitted to by the greatest thinkers.

I will not carry the subject farther in the present Letter, but conclude by calling your attention to the importance of the distinctions I have drawn.

It is of great consequence to have a clear apprehension of the difference between primal facts — facts not within the province of proof — and facts which rest on evidence: also to understand that employing evidence, and the act of reasoning, are one and the same process. We are also deeply concerned in discerning how it is that one fact has the power of proving another, or, in other words,

what are the characteristics of the facts which are capable of proving and susceptible of being proved.

It is likewise important to be aware that our inferences are unavoidably limited to causes, effects, and concomitant results, such or similar to such as we have already experienced.

Nor is it of inferior moment to be able to discriminate the facts we can legitimately infer, whether past, contemporal or future, from those creations of the imagination which, boundless as they may appear, are yet equally with our inferences strictly limited to the elements of knowledge supplied by the perception of external objects and by other forms of consciousness.

## LETTER VI.

## LAWS OF NATURE.

AFTER the complete exposure by Dugald Stewart of Montesquieu's confused employment of the term *law* at the commencement of his celebrated treatise "Esprit des Lois," it is surprising to find similar confusion frequently re-appearing in the present day.

Mr. Stewart's words are, "Even the great Montesquieu in the very first chapter of his principal work, has lost himself in a fruitless attempt to explain its meaning, when by a simple statement of the essential distinction between its literal and metaphorical acceptations, he might have at once cleared up the mystery. After telling us that 'laws in their most extensive signification are the necessary relations (*les rapports nécessaires*) which arise from the nature of things, and that in this sense, *all* beings have their laws;—that the Deity has *his* laws; the material world *its* laws; intelligences superior to man *their* laws; the brutes *their* laws; man *his* laws;' he proceeds to remark, 'That the moral world is far from being so well governed as the material; for the former, although it has *its*

laws which are invariable, does not observe these laws so constantly as the latter.' It is evident (proceeds Mr. Stewart) that this remark derives whatever plausibility it possesses from a play upon words; from confounding *moral* laws with *physical*; or in plainer terms, from confounding laws which are addressed by a legislator to intelligent beings, with those general conclusions concerning the established order of the universe to which, when legitimately inferred from an induction sufficiently extensive, philosophers have metaphorically applied the title of Laws of Nature." \*

One of the particular evils which I am desirous of emphatically pointing out as resulting from the confusion of two meanings animadverted upon in the foregoing extract, is a very lax and inaccurate mode of speaking of the infraction or violation of the laws of nature.

It is plain enough that a law of morality may be violated, but it seems not to be generally understood that a law of nature is in a very different position; and accordingly the infraction of both is often indiscriminately spoken of, as if something took place with regard to material laws corresponding to a breach of moral laws.

Everybody understands what it is to violate a moral law. A thief breaks the law *thou shalt not steal*. He does steal. He does that which the law

\* Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, Vol. II. Chap. 2. Sect. 4.

forbids him to do. The deed is done although the law declares that it shall not be done.

But mark how different it is with a law of nature. It is a law of nature that the fumes of burning charcoal in a close room destroy life. A man inadvertently shuts himself up in a chamber without a vent and warmed by a pan of that substance in a state of ignition. He perishes. Here the writers I have in view would affirm that the man had violated a law of nature; but instead of a law of nature being violated, it was in truth completely carried out. Nature (if I may adopt the florid language common on such topics) proclaims her law that the fumes of charcoal destroy life, and she enforces it with unfaltering rigour.

What was violated on this occasion was clearly not any law of nature but a law of prudence or wisdom,—if we may dignify it by so high a name—that teaches us to avoid subjecting ourselves to the deadly action of the law which nature has clearly proclaimed and will unsparingly execute. In plain language the poor man in my hypothetical instance, was ignorant or heedless of the properties of the things he meddled with and suffered in consequence.

And so it is throughout. Prudential maxims may be set at nought or infringed, ethical rules may be broken, the enactments of the legislature may be violated, but the laws of nature cannot in any sense be correctly spoken of as the subjects of similar infraction.



It is obvious enough, however, that rules of conduct, maxims of prudence, and precepts of wisdom, must, in order to be effectual for their purpose, be founded on the laws of nature; or, in other words, be conformable to the qualities of things. Wisdom and prudence require for their perfection an accurate knowledge of the physical and mental agents amongst which we are placed, so that wisdom may select her instruments, and prudence be able to point out what to avoid: but without the undeviating operation of these agents, or, in different language, the uniform connexion of causes and effects, no rules of conduct could be formed and wisdom and prudence would be vain.

There is one objection to the tenour of the preceding remarks which it may be worth while to consider, especially as to do so will afford opportunities of further elucidating the distinctions here drawn.

It may be said that the moral law *thou shalt not steal* is just as unalterable as any physical law, so that in this respect the two kinds of law are on an equality, and one may be spoken of in the same language as the other.

This brings us to a minuter examination of what infringing, or breaking, or violating a law, signifies.

When we say that a moral law is violated we certainly do not mean that the law itself is altered.

The violation consists in some one acting con-

trary to it, while it still continues in force and unchanged. On one side is the unalterable precept; on the other the unconformable conduct. But the precept is as essential to the violation as the action which contravenes it; just as in the deviation of a right line A from parallelism with another right line B, the second line is as necessary to the deviation as the first.

In what is called a law of nature on the other hand the precept is wanting: there is no injunction and consequently it is impossible to act contrary to it. In truth the phrase *acting contrary to the law*, a phrase so clear and definite when applied to ethical precepts or legal enactments, has no real meaning when applied to the laws of nature. You cannot in any conceivable sense act contrary to them. Do what you will, you must submit to them as they are. Whether you stifle yourself with the fumes of charcoal in a chamber hermetically sealed, or preserve your life by providing a proper vent for the suffocating gas, the laws of nature are equally observed; a violation of such laws is equally impossible.

The laws of nature are in truth, as every philosopher knows and as Mr. Stewart clearly points out, nothing more than generalised facts, and it is only by a metaphor that the title in question is assigned to them. To deduce consequences from a literal interpretation of the figurative expression, is to plunge into error.

There is a further consideration which brings the present subject more especially under the Philosophy of the human mind, and may serve to vindicate, if that were necessary, the place assigned to it in these letters. Mental as well as material operations are concerned in the investigation.

Hitherto we have been engaged in contrasting laws of nature in the physical world with laws of conduct in the moral one. We must not suppose, however, that laws of nature and physical laws are co-extensive.

And this caution is the more requisite as it is much easier to confound a *mental* law of nature than a physical one with an ethical or civil law.

The distinction may be rendered more palpable by a brief explanation of the several kinds of laws relating to conduct.

(1) There are laws in the conduct of mankind which resemble physical laws in being *causal*; in other words uniform effects result from mental or moral causes as they do from physical causes: thus distrust is engendered by falsehood, and resentment is excited by injury.

(2) There are laws of wisdom or prudence, grounded on these causal laws, which we lay down for the government of our own conduct, or at least observe in practice from prudential considerations. Thus, as it is wise to avoid the fumes of charcoal, so it is wise to speak truth in our intercourse with our neighbours, and to refrain from inflicting in-

juries upon them, were it solely on account of the consequences predicated in the preceding causal laws, other motives apart.

(3) In addition to the preceding laws there are precepts given to us or enforced upon us by other persons, which are likely for the most part to agree with them. Thus we might receive from authority the precepts "thou shalt not lie to thy neighbours," "thou shalt not injure any one," as well as adopt maxims of conduct corresponding to them from enlightened views of our own nature and position as human beings.

In the first of these three cases, the laws resemble physical laws; they are what may be conveniently designated (as physical laws are) *natural* and cannot be, in any proper sense of the term, broken. Lying will engender distrust and injuries will provoke resentment.

If, neglecting these consequences, you utter falsehoods to your neighbour and injure his welfare, you do not break the natural laws, or in other words interrupt or alter the succession of causes and effects, but your conduct is an infraction of rule which comes within the second case: you violate the prudential maxims which prescribe that lying must be avoided if you desire the confidence of your fellow-men; and the infliction of injuries shunned if you seek not to provoke resentment and retaliation. Further, your false and injurious behaviour will be an infraction of rule also under

the third case: you will contravene the precepts imposed by authority, and thus be additionally unwise by drawing on yourself the penalties of disobedience.

The inconsistency of speaking in the same breath of the uniform operation of the laws of nature and of the observance and infraction of such laws is exceedingly prevalent; and the impropriety of it is aggravated by the speaker's dilating also on the rewards and punishments respectively of such observance and such infraction.

One of the most striking instances of it is contained in the following passage from "Volney's Treatise on the Law of Nature," which, although the book may now be considered obsolete, faithfully represents what still continues to be uttered.

"It is a law of nature that water flows from an upper to a lower situation; that it seeks its level; that it is heavier than air; that all bodies tend towards the earth; that flame rises towards the sky; that it destroys the organisation of vegetables and animals; that air is essential to the life of certain animals; that, in certain cases, water suffocates and kills them; that certain juices of plants and certain minerals, attack their organs, and destroy their life; and the same of a variety of facts.

"Now since these facts, and many similar ones, are constant, regular, and immutable, they become so many *real commands, to which man is bound*

*to conform under the express penalty of punishment attached to their infraction, or well-being connected with their observance.* So that if a man were to pretend to see clearly in the dark, or is regardless of the progress of the seasons, or the action of the elements; if he pretends to exist under water without drowning, to handle fire without burning himself, or deprive himself of air without suffocating, or to drink poison without destroying himself; he receives for each infraction of the law of nature, a corporal punishment proportioned to his transgression. If, on the contrary, he observes these laws, and founds his practice on the precise and regular relation which they bear to him, he preserves his existence, and renders it as happy as it is capable of being rendered."

Here the error of representing instances of the natural connexion of causes and effects as things enjoined, is conspicuously exhibited; for in order to effect a parallel between violating precepts and acting without prudent attention to the laws of nature, the writer, bending before the inviolability of natural successions, is obliged to resort to the strange assertion that man sometimes *pretends* to act contrary to those laws. But the whole passage is fallacious and confused. No philosophical speculation should begin with a fiction, and it is altogether a fiction to represent natural laws (*i. e.* the qualities of objects around us) as commands. No commands are issued and none should be

assumed. It is equally indulging in fiction to speak of observing and transgressing the said laws; of reaping the reward attendant on the first and incurring the punishment appointed for the second. The truth involved in this verbiage is nothing more than that similar causes uniformly produce similar effects; and that it is a knowledge of these uniform successions which enables us to adjust our conduct to them so as to avoid evil and to secure good.

The same error runs through a work which has obtained a large circulation, "The Constitution of Man considered in relation to External Objects," by Mr. George Combe.

It is the production of an able, intelligent, and to a certain extent clear-headed writer, who grapples with a question manfully and seems to have no aim but the discovery and inculcation of truth. Taking for its basis the system originated by Dr. Gall, it is of course full of the language and of the errors of the phrenologists. But although these deform and injure the work, the substantial excellence of the matter is not destroyed by them. The best parts of the author's speculations might be expressed in common language exempt from all reference to phrenology, not only without detriment but with great advantage to their perspicuity and force.

But besides phrenological verbiage, the great and misleading error about the laws of nature

which I have above described, pervades the whole book, and unavoidably detracts from the clearness and philosophical precision of its statements and reasonings.

This defect which consists, as we have seen, in a confusion of certain things that ought to be kept distinct and a consequent loose application of language, leads Mr. Combe into a good many trite truisms or nugatory propositions, the real character of which would be at once disclosed if they were expressed in common phraseology.

The substantial drift of his book is to trace and exhibit the connexion of causes and effects in the external world and in ourselves as far as they concern human happiness — to awake attention to the properties of mind and matter so far as they produce pleasure and pain, good and evil: to insist on the invariableness of these properties, the undeviating uniformity with which causes produce their effects: and to illustrate on the one hand, the wisdom of regulating our conduct by such facts, and on the other, the folly of expecting any different results — the futility of anticipating exemption from evil when we have taken the very way to bring it upon our heads; or of looking for a specific good depending on means which we have not been at the trouble to employ.

All these truths, valuable as they are, may nevertheless be explained and enforced without the introduction of imaginary commands and the



fictitious infraction of them. There is not an instructive train of thought or a forcible representation of acts and consequences in the whole book, which would not be improved by being stripped of the phraseology of what may be called philosophical fiction.

Mr. Combe, however, from a deficiency in the power of precise thinking on the abstruser parts of philosophy, has fallen into the error of perpetually and systematically using such language. The two opposite courses of action which he has described, he designates respectively as observing and violating the laws of nature, not consistently seeing, what he sometimes positively and plainly enough asserts, that no violation is possible; that these expressions mean nothing more than prudently squaring our conduct to the properties of the existences around us on the one hand and neglecting to do it on the other. The whole discourse is an expansion of the common saying, "As you sow so shall you reap." He enforces what all know but are apt to forget, that as you will have to abide the consequences of your own acts you must take care what you are about. If you seek refuge under a tree in a thunder-storm, you will probably be struck dead; if you run into the fire you will certainly be burnt.

This is all. It is an excellent lesson to dilate upon; and he has illustrated it by striking examples of human conduct, and the happiness and

misery which may arise from that conduct being well or ill directed by attention or inattention to the laws of nature or the properties of surrounding objects; but there is no question at all of commands, of observance and infraction, of obedience and disobedience, of rewards and punishments. Such terms find their proper place in a different connexion. They relate to those precepts and rules and maxims which grow up amongst mankind or are prescribed for the guidance of our conduct, and which we may be properly said to obey or to disobey, to observe or to infringe.

There is another incorrect view of the laws of nature, or, more properly speaking perhaps, an incorrect mode of using the phrase leading to substantial incorrectness, which we occasionally encounter in philosophical or historical speculations. The fault in question consists in ranging statistical results under that denomination, and then attributing to them as laws, the power of regulating if not of causing events.

Of this singular sort of attribution, the accomplished author of the "History of Civilization in England," presents us with the most conspicuous instances in his comprehensive speculations. For example, he cites the fact that in countries where returns of the number of suicides in several consecutive years have been furnished, the annual amount of those lamentable occurrences is nearly the same. He afterwards proceeds to say:

"These being the peculiarities of this singular crime, it is surely an astonishing fact, that all the evidence we possess respecting it points to one great conclusion, and can leave no doubt on our minds, that suicide is merely the product of the general condition of society, and that the individual felon only carries into effect what is a necessary consequence of preceding circumstances. In a given state of society, a certain number of persons must put an end to their own life. This is the general law; and the special question as to who shall commit the crime, depends of course upon special laws; which, however, in their total action, must obey the large social law to which they are all subordinate. And the power of the larger law is so irresistible, that neither the love of life nor the fear of another world can avail anything towards even checking its operation."\*

In this passage he begins, you will observe, by ascribing suicide itself to the general condition of society which is a real if not a very definite cause; but when he proceeds to give us the law of the phenomenon, he states merely the uniformity of the effect; and in what follows he erects a simple statistical result into a powerful agent which nothing can withstand. Not only does he designate it as a large social law of irresistible force, but more strangely still, he speaks of certain

\* History of Civilisation in England, by H. T. Buckle. Vol. I. p. 26. 1857.

special laws as obeying it (a novel feature in the action of laws) and as, in their subordinate capacity, determining who shall commit the crime. This is perplexing enough; for the large social law in question being, that in any given condition of society a certain number of suicides necessarily take place, which is a fact or result brought out by a comparison of statistical returns, how can this result, made up of the cases occurring, govern the special laws by which the individual persons concerned were determined to the fatal act? How can the numerical amount of the cases govern the circumstances which produce them?

Instead of investing numerical results with the attributes of power, Mr. Buckle would have done more wisely if he had looked steadily at those real causes on which he contents himself with casting a momentary glance.

Why the number of suicides is in any given year what it is, neither larger nor smaller, and uniform with that in other years, must be dependent, it is plain, on some positive circumstances or other: it is not a self-constituted fact.

The number is, in truth, determined by the concurrence and conflict of various motives to which not a few human beings are unhappily subjected, impelling them to the rash act, or withholding them from it, the former motives being frequently suggested by external circumstances obvious or assignable; the latter consisting for the

most part of that love of life and that fear of another world, which Mr. Buckle describes as so unavailing to check the numerical law, but which are indisputably efficient causes and mainly instrumental in keeping down these melancholy occurrences to their actual amount.

Should the motives which prompt to the act be multiplied or strengthened, as, for example, by the coming on of commercial distress, or by the increase of gambling or of drunkenness, there can be no doubt that the love of life and the fear of another world would oftener give way, and the number of suicides would be raised. On the other hand, should prosperity add a relish to life, and judicious legislation withdraw the temptations of the gaming-house and the gin-shop, the conservative motives would not only be fortified but have fewer assaults to withstand, and a reduction in the melancholy list would eventually follow. If I am here stating trite and obvious truths, it is because the character of the fallacies combated naturally leads to them.

To show the nature of Mr. Buckle's doctrine in a still clearer light, let us see how the position assumed by him would do, if it were applied in some analogous cases.

"Every year there is a certain number of panes broken in hot-houses by hail-storms. Assume the average proportion to be ten per cent. in the whole country. What particular hot-houses will

be subject to this calamity will depend on special laws which in their total action must obey the large meteorological law, the power of which is so irresistible that neither strength of glass nor any skill on the part of the glazier, can even check it. Ten per cent. of the panes must be broken."

This may appear absurd enough, but it is not, I think, an unfair parallel with Mr. Buckle's representation on the subject of suicides.

A few pages subsequently, he furnishes another instance of such laws (as he regards them) in relation to marriages, but it is really of a different character, and it may be instructive to examine in what the difference consists.

He tells us that "the number of marriages annually contracted [in certain countries] is determined not by the temper and wishes of individuals but by large general facts over which individuals can exercise no authority." He then adds, "It is now known that marriages bear a fixed and definite relation to the price of corn, and in England the experience of a century has proved that instead of having any connexion with personal feelings, they are simply regulated by the average earnings of the great mass of the people: so that this immense social and religious institution is not only swayed, but is completely controlled, by the price of food and by the rate of wages."\*

\* History of Civilisation in England, Vol. I. p. 30.

Here the large general facts, unlike those which we have been considering, are actually *causes* that affect the result, any marked prosperity among the people increasing the marriages, and any marked adversity reducing the number in a given time.

But instead of any hostility existing between the action of these causes and the operation of those personal feelings, which Mr. Buckle strips of all influence, and places even in an antithetical attitude, the great result necessarily depends on both. It may be true enough that the earnings of the people and the price of corn control the number of marriages, and yet the temper and wishes of individuals may none the less have a hand in making that number what it is; for how do these large causes operate? Not directly or immediately as water quenches thirst or extinguishes fire; they are not physical causes nor are they proximate to the effects, but act through intermediate principles or agencies, and chiefly through those personal feelings, which Mr. Buckle discards as having nothing to do with the result. It is because work is scarce or wages are diminished or food is dear, that the young artizan hesitates to undertake the charge of a family, and it is when these unfavourable conditions disappear and prosperity begins to dawn upon him once more that he begins again to entertain the design of marriage which he had before found it prudent to lay aside. The whole process through which the price of food and the rate of

wages operate upon the number of marriages, is a process of thought and feeling, of "temper and wishes," nor can they operate in any other way or through any other channel so as to affect the result.

There is an additional fallacy implied, I think, in some of Mr. Buckle's arguments, and not unfrequently to be met with in speculations on society and social economy.

The facts with which the reasoning is concerned are too often spoken of as if they were of a physical or material nature, when they are in reality mental phenomena, i.e. mental causes or effects. Such are the price of food, the rate of wages, and contracts of marriage, which are all alike the results of voluntary acts, and when any of these results are affected by physical or political or social events, it must be through the minds of human beings. If the error does not always take as broad a shape as here described, it often happens that the mental character of the incidents is manifestly either overlooked or not fully kept in view.

Nor does Mr. Buckle, as far as I can understand him, see clearly into the subject of moral causation. He appears to me not to discern the truth that circumstances whether physical, social, or political, may be so connected as causes in the chain of events with human volitions and actions, that the actions may be confidently predicted from the circumstances and yet be perfectly free.



Human life is, in truth, crowded with instances of this description; and it may be laid down as a general principle every day abundantly exemplified, that the freedom of human actions and the power of predicting them are perfectly compatible.\*

\* See Letters XIV. and XV., Second Series, "On the Causation of Voluntary Actions."

## LETTER VII.

## LANGUAGE.

I HAVE already had to consider several important points in the philosophy of language, but it is too intimately connected with mental operations to be passed over, in these letters, without express investigation of several questions involved in it.

One of these relates to the specific intellectual function of words considered singly; and another is, how words are affected when combined in sentences; neither of which has been so accurately and exhaustively treated as to preclude further discussion or elucidation.

When a word has indicated\* or brought to mind the object or event for which it stands, it seems to me to have done all *intellectually* that it needs to do, or that it is desirable for it to do. It may cause an emotion of some kind as well as indicate an object or raise up a mental conception, and, by the thought or the feeling called up, may even awaken a multitude of associated thoughts

\* I say *indicated*, to include cases in which the object designated by the word is actually present and consequently cannot be said to be brought to mind.

and feelings; but these are only incidental and variable effects; and irrespective of them, its direct intellectual function is perfectly accomplished when in certain cases it has indicated, and in others brought to mind, the object which it signifies.

The various ways in which words are connected with feelings constitute undoubtedly a subject of much interest and importance, and one also of much difficulty on account of the nicety required to distinguish the effects of the mere words from the effects of the ideas raised up by them.

A word while possessing the same intellectual significance in two successive ages, may cause a different emotion in each: and of two words in the same age meaning the same thing, one may excite pleasure, or shame, or loathing, and the other be heard with indifference. When, too, a word has raised up the precise idea of the object, that idea may suggest other ideas to an indefinite extent, but the latter, like the emotions just mentioned, do not enter into the meaning of the word. The influence of rhetoric, the beauties of poetry, the charm of personal conversation and epistolary intercourse, doubtless greatly depend not only on the precision with which words are used to raise up the ideas of the particular objects denoted by them, but on the tact (often instinctive) with which they are selected to awaken such emotions and associated ideas as will conduce to the purpose in view. Similar influences belong to the variable tones and

inflections of the voice, but we do not on that account consider the signification of the individual words uttered to vary with them, although the total effect of what is said, will so vary.

At present I pass by these influences; I am concerned with language only as an instrument for recording and communicating knowledge and lending aid to reasoning — with its purely intellectual function.

It may be objected indeed that if I admit a word to be capable of awakening other ideas than that of the object denoted by it, the intellectual function includes the rousing of associated thoughts; an objection, however, which is at once removed by a consideration of the circumstance that it is not the word which calls up the associated ideas, but it is the idea raised up or the emotion awakened by the word: and while the word ought to bring into the minds of all who use or hear it, one precise idea or one of a precise class of ideas, the associations with which that idea is connected may vary indefinitely in every individual without at all affecting the signification.

With regard to the intellectual power of words in certain cases, I have already shown that common names and abstract terms can do no more than bring before the mind particular objects or combinations just as proper names do.

Men know only individual things, although it may be in groups or sequences: there is in truth

nothing else for them to know; they can think only of what they thus become acquainted with, and it would be strange if words had the power of enabling or compelling them to do otherwise — to think of anything else.

It is no valid objection to this statement that we think of many merely imaginary objects,

“Gorgons and hydras and chimeras dire,”

for a slight analysis suffices to show that every one of these fabulous monsters, is made up of parts familiar to us through the organs of sense. It cannot indeed be otherwise.

In considering the efficiency of words, it is important to bear in mind that a name, whether articulated or written, is itself a real entity, a sound or visible object, and it is probably owing in part to this substantial existence that so many fictitious entities are created by or rather out of language.

The word itself being real, there is always something for the mind to dwell upon, so that even in the use of an abstract term, which has no corresponding abstract idea (to speak for a moment of a non-entity) but is suggestive only of shifting objects each as individual as if it had been called up by a proper name, the term presents itself to us as a fixed independent thing audible or visible or both.

Hence probably we are prone to conclude that

there is something equally distinct and independent in the consequent mental representation, to correspond with it.

For want of considering the precise intellectual office and power of words; that their special function is to bring before the mind objects and events already known (at least in their constituent parts) several singular doctrines have been maintained.

It is obvious that if the object named is brought before the mind clearly and fully by the name, it is of no importance in respect of the power of the word to perform its intellectual function, how it came to be associated with the object. Provided that the one directly suggests the other the utmost perfection of language, simply as an intellectual instrument, is attained. How extraordinary soever may have been the way in which the word came to be associated with the thing, that circumstance has not, nor can it beneficially have, any effect on the meaning when once the association has been perfectly established.

To trace the manner in which this took place is often interesting and instructive, and even amusing; but when the name has become so familiar as directly to suggest the object, and the object directly suggests the name, the end of language as an instrument of reasoning and of communicating knowledge, is attained, nor can any etymological researches, whatever historical or philosophical interest they may possess, improve it. With

almost all people, this complete and direct connexion of name and object is established in the case of external and familiar things. The name, in fact, comes to form an inseparable adjunct of the thing designated by it, so that many of the uneducated regard it as naturally belonging to the object, just as much as the shape and the colour.

Hence their amazement when, on first going into foreign countries, they hear children fluently talking French or German. They can understand how a man or a woman may learn a foreign tongue, as any one learns to play on the violin or the piano; but that boys and girls who are only just able to articulate, should speak one, seems to them perfectly unnatural. I once overheard in Paris one of those raw travellers from our country who are often to be met with there — men scarcely suspecting the existence of any language but their own except as an accomplishment — say in an indignant tone to a *garçon* who addressed him in French, “Why do’nt you speak English you fool?” evidently thinking it to be very affected and perverse in the lad to speak anything else.

So direct is this connexion and so little does the derivation interfere with it, that even when a word bears its etymological descent on its very face, as in many compound phrases such as Christmas-box, honey-suckle, snow-drop, butter-cup, candlestick, it does not bring to mind the two things joined

together, but a single object, sometimes differing from both.

Amongst country people in the north, who in the fine days of summer are in the habit of spreading their clothes on the hedges to dry, it is very common to call the wooden frame or stand on which in bad weather they hang their linen within the house for the same purpose, "a winter-hedge"—in itself quite a poetical name but suggesting to the minds of those amongst whom it is used nothing but a convenient piece of furniture. No thought arises of the analogy between the wooden frame in the laundry in winter, and the hawthorn fence of summer: the latter indeed not being brought to mind, the analogy cannot occur.

I recollect passing some time in a family of both children and adults, who were in the constant use of the phrase "*ten-to-one*," either as an adjective or as an adverb, to express probability. "It is ten to one," they would say, "that such a thing will take place," meaning it is highly probable; and this, without advertng in the faintest degree to the literal signification of the expression, to the relation between ten and one, or even to the numbers themselves; but actually considering the composite sound as one word.

I have said that the knowledge of the derivation of a word, when once we are acquainted with its precise signification, cannot improve the word as an intellectual instrument. I may even go



farther and say that such etymological knowledge, although it may sometimes help the learner to the meaning of a word not understood, has a tendency when much dwelt upon or habitually suggested to pervert or render less definite our conception of what the term denotes.

“It is in many cases,” as Mr. Stewart well observes, “a fortunate circumstance, when the words we employ have lost their pedigree; or (what amounts nearly to the same thing) when it can be traced by those alone who are skilled in ancient and in foreign languages. Such words have in their favour the sanction of immemorial use; and the obscurity of their history prevents them from misleading the imagination, by recalling to it the sensible objects and phenomena to which they owed their origin. The notions, accordingly, we annex to them may be expected to be peculiarly precise and definite, being entirely the result of those habits of induction which I have shown to be so essentially connected with the acquisition of language.” \*

In confirmation of this view, I may repeat an observation which has been frequently made, that the style of deeply learned men is apt to be damaged by their knowledge of other languages than their own, and of the derivation of the terms they employ. Mr. Stewart gives a similar conclu-

\* Philosophical Essays, 3rd Ed. p. 234.

sion as the result of his personal observation; "I have hardly met," he says, "with an individual, habitually addicted to them [etymological studies] who wrote his own language with ease and elegance,"\* and he quotes a valuable passage from a French author to the same effect. "It is so seldom," says M. de Rivarol, "that the etymology of a word coincides with its true acceptation, that we cannot plead in favour of researches of this kind that they serve to fix better the senses of words. Those writers who are acquainted with the greatest number of languages, are the persons who commit the greatest number of improprieties. Too much engrossed with the ancient force of a term, they forget its value in their own day, and neglect those delicate shades of meaning which constitute the grace and the power of composition."†

The effect here described is frequently produced even in those who are not professed etymologists by the habit of composing in a foreign dialect whether ancient or modern. Such a habit almost inevitably leads to the use of forms of speech not consonant with the genius of the writer's native language. Idiomatic phrases intrinsically illogical but sanctioned by long custom and therefore not only justifiable but forcible in their original place, are transplanted into a medium in which

\* Philosophical Essays, p. 242.

† Ibid. p. 243. Mr. Stewart is not answerable for the translation.

their logical deficiencies become glaring: while concurrently the delicacies of indigenous phraseology are forgotten. Any one who wishes to acquire a pure English style should avoid habitual composition in Latin or Greek, or indeed any other tongue than his own, and should expressly apply himself to the latter for the purpose of acquiring a thorough knowledge of all its niceties, an insight both into the structure of its sentences, the allocation of its particles, epithets, and adverbs, and the signification as well as the emotional power of its words. To pass through a mere course of classical education is altogether insufficient in itself for attaining a mastery of his native language.\*

These remarks do not at all detract from the value of etymology in its own sphere, but are intended to show that its sphere is not to determine from derivation the actual meaning of words, and that to know the origin of the terms we employ may rather hinder than aid their intellectual function.

What in truth, if we come to close analysis, is the effect of etymological knowledge concerning the origin and the changes in meaning of a perfectly

\* See Note B. in the Appendix. Since this letter was written the study of the English language has been ably urged by Mr. D'Orsey in a little volume, which will repay perusal, entitled "The Study of the English Language an essential Part of a University Course."

intelligible word, when such knowledge is awakened in our minds at the sight or on the utterance of the word? The effect is undoubtedly to divide the attention between the present and the past significations, whence in the rapidity of discourse vacillation and confusion are naturally apt to arise. Observe I am not doubting whether etymology may assist us in the interpretation of a term which we do not yet comprehend; but I am questioning whether it is of any use, or rather whether it is not positively detrimental, in the case of words perfectly understood; or, to express the matter differently, in the case of words that raise up immediately and clearly in ordinary minds the ideas of the objects denoted by them.

Doubtless such knowledge on the part of individuals frequently helps them to recognize the signification of technical terms in pursuits different from their own; which is rather a personal and accidental advantage arising from their particular attainments than any thing else. A Greek scholar ignorant of Geology, might know from the name *Ichthyosaurus*, should he happen to meet with it, that by that uncouth designation some animal must be indicated combining the forms of the fish and the lizard; and so far his Greek would be useful; but it could not give him any knowledge of the thing worth speaking of. Contrast for a moment his vague conception with that of an unlearned man who had actually inspected the fossil

remains of the extinct species. Hugh Millar, who had not classical learning enough to prevent him from writing *animalculæ* for *animalcula*, had doubtless as vivid and accurate an idea of that monstrous Saurian, as if he had been fully charged with Greek and perfectly acquainted with the derivation of its composite name. When the object and the name are thus sensibly brought together and directly connected with each other in the mind of the observer, nothing else is required for constituting the word a perfect intellectual instrument. To know that the name is derived from two Greek words is simply to know that it is so derived — an item of etymological learning, nothing more: it does not in the slightest degree improve or increase or make clearer our knowledge of its signification, that is, of the object which it denotes, although it may possibly help the memory to retain the meaning of the term.

The considerations here adduced all confirm the conclusions to which I before came, that the present meaning of a word is a matter of fact not gathered from its derivation but ascertained and ascertainable solely from the actual usage of writers and speakers current in our own age.

Etymology may show that the word ought not to be applied in the sense in which it is used, perhaps by uneducated or careless writers, and may usefully restrain and retard or even wholly prevent the perversion of it from its primitive

acceptation; but nevertheless if that perversion becomes general, even the learned and the fastidious must eventually submit to it.

Notwithstanding the unqualified condemnation passed by Horne Tooke upon the celebrated saying of Horace in his Art of Poetry; the poet, I venture to think, is both practically and philosophically right.

Mortalia facta peribunt :

Nedum sermonum stet honos, et gratia vivax.

Multa renascentur, quæ jam cecidêre ; cadentque

Quæ nunc sunt in honore vocabula, *si volet usus,*

*Quem penes arbitrium est et jus et norma loquendi.\**

In a subsequent letter, I shall have occasion to examine some other advantages which have been attributed to the science of verbal derivation.

You may have remarked that in the preceding discussion I have treated words as immediately denoting things, without employing the customary designation "signs of ideas."

I have avoided the use of it because I do not see that it is needed, and especially because it has been employed in a way inconsistent with my view of the true intellectual function of words.

The practice of denominating words the signs of ideas, is certainly little short of universal in philosophical treatises of recent date.

But on my doctrine of ideas being all without exception representative conceptions, it follows

\* De Arte Poetica, v. 68.

that words, if they can be called signs at all, are primarily signs of things, and only in a secondary manner the signs of the ideas of things. There are not two names one for the thing and the other for the idea of the thing, and consequently a sign which indicates both, ought to be considered as belonging to the former—to the substance rather than to the shadow.

In my own opinion, however, the term sign is not a happy designation for either.

Words are never called the signs of ideas except in books of philosophy.

No one ever speaks of "John" as the sign of the idea of a man, or of "apple" as the sign of the idea of a fruit.

Nor is it according to usage to apply the term even to objects themselves. We do not say that "lily" is the sign of a flower, or that "lake" is the sign of a sheet of water, but we say it is the name.\*

\* In my objection to this phraseology, I find I have, in part at least, the concurrence of Mr. Mill, with whom I am always glad to be in accordance. He does not take exception at the word sign as I have done, but he speaks of names as follows: "Are names more properly said to be the names of things, or of our ideas of things? The first is the expression in common use; the last is that of some metaphysicians, who conceived that in adopting it, they were introducing a highly important distinction."—*Logic*, 5th Ed. Vol. I. p. 23. He subsequently gives his reasons for adopting the common usage of speaking of names as the names of things themselves and not merely of our ideas of things.

We use, it is true, the expression that “lake” *signifies* a sheet of water; but this is only one amongst numerous instances of a great difference in the application of paronymous words — a subject, by the way, of unappreciated interest and importance.

If there are, as there possibly may be, cases in which “sign” might be a more convenient phrase than “name” I certainly am unable at the moment to call any of them to mind.



## LETTER VIII.

LANGUAGE (*in continuation*).

IN my last letter I was occupied in showing that the perfection of a word as an intellectual instrument consists in its being so closely associated with the thing denoted as to raise up the idea of it at once; and that a knowledge of how the word and the thing came to be thus connected, although interesting and in other respects valuable, is quite needless for the perfection spoken of, and has indeed rather a tendency to lessen it.

It is implied in this doctrine, or, perhaps more correctly, it is the same doctrine varied in expression, that the intellectual effect produced by any word, or in different language the object brought to mind, or in still different language the idea raised up, constitutes what is called the meaning of a word.

The idea raised up by the word is not one thing and the meaning another: they are one and the same: the two phrases so employed are equivalent.

The importance of bearing this truth in mind through all discussions of the subject is extreme.

It clears up not only the difficulties attending

the signification of general and abstract terms, but also two other points on which there has been much difference of opinion, namely, the alleged intrinsic meaning of words, and how words are affected in their signification when combined into sentences. It is the first of these points which I purpose to consider in the present letter. Although it was virtually disposed of in my last, it will not be useless to bestow on the doctrine, as maintained by recent etymologists, a direct and a fuller examination.

Horne Tooke manifestly proceeds on the assumption that words have an intrinsic meaning\* which they continuously preserve and which according to him is always distinguishable amidst the various applications in which they may be employed.

This able and ingenious etymologist but not equally profound metaphysician, fell under the criticism of a philosopher who saw with tolerable clearness both the strength and the weakness of the general speculations contained in "The Diversions of Purley," although he may have dwelt more on the faults than on the merits of the work. After quoting from it the celebrated passage about

\* Mr. Tooke is often exceedingly shy of definite statement and explanation where they are most wanted, and I cannot find that he uses the phrase *intrinsic meaning*; but his expositor, Dr. Richardson, employs it to show what the doctrine of the Diversions of Purley is, as I shall shortly have to notice, and employs it, I think, correctly for that purpose.

“right,” Mr. Stewart, the critic to whom I allude, proceeds as follows: “Through the whole of this passage Mr. Tooke evidently assumes as a principle that in order to ascertain, with precision, the philosophical import of any word, it is necessary to trace its progress historically through all the successive meanings which it has been employed to convey from the moment it was first introduced into our language; or, if the word be of foreign growth, that we should prosecute the etymological research, till we ascertain the literal and primitive sense of the root from whence it sprung. It is in this literal and primitive sense alone, that according to him a philosopher is entitled to employ it, even in the present advanced state of science; and whenever he annexes to it a meaning at all different, he imposes equally on himself and on others.”\*

After quoting this passage, one of the recent expositors of the *Diversions of Purley* proceeds to answer it as follows:

“To the Professor I reply, that Tooke’s doctrine is simply this: That from the etymology of the word we† should fix the intrinsic meaning; that that meaning should always furnish the cause of the application, and that no application of any word is justifiable for which that meaning will not supply a reason; but that the usage of any appli-

\* Philosophical Essays, p. 218.

† Who and when?

cation so supported is not only allowable but indispensable." After adverting to a diversity of application and to changes effected by usage, he says: "The meaning, nevertheless, remains uniform, unvarying, and invariable; the application and sub-audition as unlimited as the numberless necessities of speech."\*

In commenting on these propositions the author of which I would treat with the respect due to him on account of his useful labours, and for which he is responsible only as having adopted the views of his predecessor and explained them in his own way, it is difficult to know how to begin from their being, as it appears to me, so completely wide of the truth.

It is obvious at the first glance that the writer uses the term "meaning" in a peculiar sense, as if it were a fixed steadfast something in a word which remained unalterable while the word could still be applied in various ways deviating more or less from it. Hence, according to him, the meaning and the application of a term are different.

The erroneousness of the doctrine will appear to any one who reflects that a word can have no meaning but in the mind of somebody, and that the meaning in every case can be no other than the intellectual effect produced, or, what is equivalent, the idea raised up by the word.

\* On the Study of Language, by Chas. Richardson, LL.D., p. 190.

To assert therefore that a word always retains an intrinsic meaning is really to affirm that the ideas raised up by it in the minds of successive generations since the word was first uttered, have always been the same or similar.

Nor is it of any avail to allege that it is the application not the meaning of the word which varies. The distinction attempted to be drawn between the two is altogether untenable.

The application of a term can be nothing else than employing the term with a meaning, that is to say, for the purpose of raising up an idea of the thing denoted by it. To apply it in one way at one time and in another way at another time, is to employ it with two different meanings.\*

That a word should have an intrinsic meaning besides its application by those who employ it, is simply impossible.

It may have one meaning to me and another to my neighbour, but this is not what is asserted: the theory maintains that besides the two meanings which we respectively have in our minds, there is another meaning of which neither of us may have the slightest knowledge, but which constantly

\* I may support my views on this question, by the following extract from Mr. Garnett's *Philological Essays*, where, speaking of the verb-substantive, he says, "many of the extravagances promulgated on the subject have arisen from the utterly erroneous idea of an intrinsic meaning in words, constituting them the counterparts and equivalents of thought," p. 341.

resides in the word; it virtually affirms that in addition to the idea produced in my mind and the different idea raised up in the mind of my neighbour, there is a third idea perpetually raised up or existing in the mind of nobody.

There cannot then be an intrinsic meaning, a meaning over and above that which is contained in the actual application of the word. In cases of a change in signification, there may be the original meaning manifested or recorded in ancient documents; but it is itself past and gone like any other historical incident, and, like any other, may be worth knowing for its influence on subsequent events, especially for its influence on the present signification of the term.

Every event or state of things which we witness at present, is the result of a long train of circumstances without which it could not be what it is; but our knowing its history cannot alter the fact before us; and such is just the case with the present meaning of a word: we may sometimes trace how the word came to mean what it does, but no success in the search can alter the fact of the actual acceptance in which it is now received, or that in which it has been at any period heretofore employed.

In fine, the present sense of a word which has served various purposes in the lapse of ages, is the result of the original signification subjected to the modifying influence of various circumstances: but

this process and its consummation no more prove an intrinsic meaning than the present existence of a descendant of the Howards proves that, besides the actual members of that family successively appearing in the world and leaving it, there has always been an intrinsic Howard.

These considerations will enable us to estimate the value of the following passage.

After adverting to the instance of *sycophant* or *fig-shower* the writer before us proceeds: "The word *sycophant* still retains its meaning; *challenger*, *informer*, *parasite*, *flatterer*, never enter into it, never become whole or part of it: that word still *means*, that is, means etymologically, and ever must so mean, a *fig-shower*, and nothing else; but in any *application* founded upon this meaning and inferred from it, (as in the above explanation, every application is inferred) the word may be used to denote the meaning of the speaker, and is so used with propriety."\*

From the explanations I have already given it is abundantly plain that instead of the word *sycophant* having retained the original meaning, it has completely lost it, and never except by accident raises up the idea of a *fig-shower*. The only things in the case which remain unalterable, are the historical facts that the word once signified *fig-shower*, and has since undergone changes in meaning. If, as here represented, it has been

\* On the Study of Language, p. 193.

successively employed to designate a challenger, an informer, a parasite, and a flatterer, so often has its acceptation varied, and the enumeration of the variations can show nothing but the mutability of language in its specific function of raising up ideas, and the gradations by which it changes.

To say that the word still means and ever must mean *etymologically* a fig-shower, is nugatory or at the best only an incorrect mode of saying that the fact of its having originally meant so, cannot be undone — is irreversible — an attribute which it shares with all other facts.\*

A good instance is adduced by Mr. Stewart to illustrate the way in which a word lapses from one signification into another until the original sense disappears.

“It has been remarked,” he says, “by several writers, that the Latin word *intervallum* was evidently borrowed from the appropriate phraseology of a camp; *inter vallos spatium*, — the space between the stakes and palisades which strengthened the rampart. None of them, however, has taken any notice of the insensible *transitions* by which it came successively to be employed in a more enlarged sense; first to express a limited portion of longitudinal extension in general; and afterwards limited portions of time as well as of space. ‘*Ut quoniam intervallo locorum et temporum disjuncti*

\* “Factum est illud; fieri infectum non potest.”



*sumus, per literas tecum quam sæpissime colloquar.*' The same word has passed into our language; and it is not a little remarkable, that it is now so exclusively appropriated to *time*, that to speak of the interval between two *places*, would be censured as a mode of expression not agreeable to common use."\*

There is a case in our own tongue analogous in the last mentioned circumstance to the preceding, which I have noticed in my Discourse "On the Changes which have taken place in the English Language." In reference to the word *punctual*, I remark, "It was formerly applied to space as well as time, but now seems to have shrunk within the narrower limits of denoting exactness in keeping engagements, or in attending to appointed hours. In writers of no remote date, we find such phrases as, "a punctual description," "a punctual relation," "a clear, full, and punctual declaration," to express what we should probably now denote by *particular* or *circumstantial*."†

In the two instances here cited there is severally a complete change in signification. What greater one could be imagined than that from denoting the space between two stakes, to designating the time between breakfast and dinner?

It may possibly be alleged that still there is an analogy in all these cases between the primitive

\* Philosophical Essays, p. 267.

† Discourses on Various Subjects, p. 85.

and the present acceptation of the words; which may be true enough; but an analogy between one signification and another, although it shows a relationship still preserved, does not constitute an intrinsic meaning.

The question is, did the word raise up different ideas in the mind severally at the two periods? If it did then there has been a change in meaning, whether the two things successively denoted by it have a close or remote analogy to each other.

Such lingering analogies seem to be the natural consequences of a fact which has frequently been the subject of remark, namely, that the meanings of words do not ordinarily change *per saltum*; they deviate gradually (for a reason I shall immediately assign) and therefore it is no wonder that what is ultimately denoted by a word after many successive changes in signification, is often found to possess something analogous to the original object. Where there has been a complete estrangement as occasionally happens from the primitive acceptation of a term, the steps (many of them curious and interesting) by which it was accomplished may be frequently although not invariably followed; and even in cases of a sudden break, some slight trace of relationship or correspondence may still remain.

There are at present alterations in the meaning of several words going on under our eyes, which, should they be generally adopted, will afford so

many instances of a break in derivation, presenting as marked a *fault* as is to be seen in any geological stratum.

The term *defalcation*, which I many years ago pointed out as employed by journalists in a sense utterly at variance with etymology,\* has now become so current in that sense (although still avoided by good writers) that it may be pronounced irreclaimable. It is used to designate the act of a *defaulter*. I can account for this leap only by supposing that writers and speakers of little education, not finding ready to their hands such a term as *defaultation* which, irregular and barbarous as it is, would have expressed their precise meaning, were misled by the sound to seize upon the existing but seldom used substantive *defalcation* as the very thing they wanted; and under this ridiculous misapprehension forced it into their service:—a sort of press-gang violence committed on that well-born noun, from a sheer mistake of identity.

In this case we have the triumph of similarity in sound over etymology; a change in signification effected *per saltum*; a blundering change, undoubtedly, but likely enough to turn out a permanent perversion.

Even here, nevertheless, not only is there re-

\* See Discourses on Various Subjects by the present author. page 95, "On the Changes which have taken place in the English Language."

semblance in the sound but analogy does not altogether disappear in the sense.

No one would probably have thought of using the word in the way pointed out, if he had not attached to it some vague notion of its legitimate meaning, so far as to understand that it implied diminution or subtraction: it was therefore an easy mistake to apply it under the influence of similarity of sound to the act of a defaulter, of which subtraction, although of a peculiar kind, is an essential feature.

Both of the acts in question may in truth be generalized under one name: they are both comprehensible under the same term: one is subtraction by lopping, the other subtraction by robbing.

Without this remote resemblance in the thing thus miscalled, the similarity in sound would scarcely have prevailed even with the dim or illiterate understandings in which the perversion originated. No one uses an old word in a new sense without some reason, and this reason, except possibly in rare cases, must be some kind of resemblance or analogy, however faint and whether real or fancied, either in sense or in sound. This seems essential even as the basis of such mistakes as that which I have here pointed out, or, in the phraseology of the day, even to make them possible.

If similarity in sense cannot be pronounced absolutely requisite in all such changes, yet, on

the other hand, it may be doubted whether similarity in sound could be effectual in any case if between the things denoted there existed positive contrariety.\* We could hardly conceive, for instance, that the word defalcation could under any circumstances come to be employed to signify an increase, or addition, or excess.

Instances like the one just noticed present us with changes of meaning in actual process. They teach us that languages are not things which transform themselves, although we are apt to speak of them as doing so ; and it is convenient enough, from the succinctness of such expressions, to talk of their growth, variations, corruption, decay and so on.

All alterations however in the meaning of terms are the work of human beings, and consequently if we wish to ascertain the causes producing them we must inquire into the circumstances which have operated on the minds of speakers and writers to determine them to employ words differently from their predecessors. In the instance of *defalcation*, I have endeavoured to trace these operating circumstances, and surely to do this in all cases, to discover the causes which have been at

\* "This reflection of meaning from words of similar sound but unconnected by their etymological origin, is necessarily confined to words not repugnant to each other in signification, but expressive of notions capable of coalescing." — *Discourses on Various Subjects before cited*, page 102.

work in bringing about these changes and which are now acting on the understandings of ourselves and our contemporaries, is a part of the philosophy of language as interesting and important as chronicling the changes themselves when they have become accomplished facts.

The truth that not the slightest alteration in meaning takes place except as the mental act of human beings, enables the metaphysician to repel if not to retort one of the disparaging remarks thrown out by Horne Tooke against intellectual philosophy. Instead of the science of mind being as he represents it merely an affair of language, the single consideration just adduced shows that language itself with all its changes from first to last, is an affair of mind; and it is singular enough that any one should ever have regarded it in any other light.

From the first word uttered by human lips to the complicated dialect of our own day, we see the mind at work on its medium of articulate expression, adding, abbreviating, expanding, contracting, separating, conjoining; but in every mutation acting under the influence of circumstances or considerations which may, to some extent at least, be traced and classified.

Without a knowledge of the mental operations concerned it is impossible for the etymologist to have a full comprehension of the subject of his

own science, and in that knowledge the author of the work before us was not an adept.

But I purpose in a subsequent letter, to examine the heterodox notions of the Diversions of Purley on the nature of Mental Philosophy.

## LETTER IX.

LANGUAGE (*in continuation*).

ALTHOUGH I examined in my last letter one of the principal doctrines of Horne Tooke appertaining to mental philosophy, yet others remain which are more or less connected with the phenomena of consciousness, and which claim attention in discussing the subject of language.

Even the one already treated will be exhibited in a still clearer light by pointing out its place in the general range of his etymological speculations.

I purpose, therefore, in the present letter to show the philosophical bearings of what he has accomplished or aimed at, in this department of knowledge, and also the philosophical errors he has committed (from exclusiveness of view I am disposed to think), especially as to the nature of his own alleged discoveries and as to the conclusions deducible from them. My intention is not to enter except incidentally upon any purely philological questions, but to keep to such points as more immediately relate to the science which I am engaged in explaining.

Mr. Tooke has been generally considered (till



recently at least) by even learned men to have established a theory, of which slight traces, indeed, may be found in preceding writers, but which, by the full development, the original proofs, the copious illustrations of it contained in his work, he may be said to have made his own; the theory, namely, that in our own language, to go no farther, not only grammatical terminations\* but all the subordinate parts of speech, the adjective, the pronoun, the adverb, the article, the preposition and the conjunction, have alike been derived from the noun or the verb: that they all originally existed as independent words in the shape of either the one or the other of those principal denominations; and that such of them as are in our present language mere particles, apparently insignificant by themselves, then pos-

\* Tooke has not devoted much space to the investigation of such terminations, his principal labour having been bestowed on the second part of the theory; but although what he has said on grammatical inflexions is almost all comprised in a single page, his merit in first showing their true character and origin, is allowed even by those who call in question his theory of the origin of particles. A recent writer who gives us the results of the latest researches respecting language, and lays it down as established that "what we now call terminations were originally independent words," proceeds to say, "The true nature of grammatical terminations was first pointed out by a philosopher, who, however wild some of his speculations may be, had certainly caught many a glimpse of the real life and growth of language, I mean Horne Tooke."—*Lectures on the Science of Language by Max Müller*, 3rd Ed. page 254.

sessed the full form and meaning which nouns and verbs possess with us in the present day.

Their actual form of particles has arisen principally from the desire for despatch in communicating our thoughts; they are abbreviations, and are not the signs of things but of other words; of the words namely from which they have been worn down to their present shape in the constant attempts at prompt expression.\*

\* Amongst the most powerful objections which have been brought against some of Tooke's views and especially his theory of the origin of particles, are those of the late Mr. Garnett, whose works have been pronounced by another eminent writer in the same department, as "by far the best works in comparative grammar and ethnology of the century." (Dr. Latham.) After quoting Mr. Price's opinion that the details in his [Tooke's] much-vaunted analysis of particles, may be contested nearly as often as they are admitted, Mr. Garnett proceeds, "We venture to go further, and to pronounce that it is, both in principle and execution, the most erroneous and defective part of the system, and that it contains very little indeed that can be safely relied upon.

"One copious source of error, affecting more or less every branch of Tooke's system, is the assumption that Anglo-Saxon and its sister dialects may be practically regarded as original languages, and, consequently, that the bulk of the abbreviated forms of speech, which we call particles, may be traced to verbs or nouns, actually existing in one or more of that tribe. All this is more easily asserted than proved: in fact we have almost invincible evidence that the assumption is a downright *petitio principii* and totally erroneous. Collateral dialects, so closely related as those in question, as certainly prove the existence of a parent language, as the co-existence of brothers and sisters implies a father before them; and as we have reason to suppose that Hecuba had a mother, though

In addition to his strenuous efforts to establish this view of the derivation of the inferior parts of speech, Mr. Tooke has with a confident hand traced a great number of our present words to a common origin, and shown that a multiplicity of terms which have at present no obvious connexion with each other, sprang from the same root.

This part of his work seems to have been undertaken chiefly with a view of showing that our abstract and general terms are descended from words signifying material objects or operations (in itself nothing new); and having successfully shown this in a great number of instances he thence concludes, with what validity I shall hereafter examine, that there is no such thing as the mental operation called Abstraction.

From the truths which, according to his own

we do not know who she was, it is at least possible, that this more ancient Teutonic, or whatever we choose to call it, might not itself be an original tongue, but a scion from a still older form of speech. If, therefore, Anglo-Saxon is a *nata natarum*, a language several descents removed from a primæval one now lost, but in all likelihood closely related to Sanscrit, is it to be supposed that all its component elements are self-existent and self-derived?"—*The Philological Essays of the late Rev. Richd. Garnett*, page 20. The argument is pursued to a greater length and into some instructive details, and as far as I can see is irrefutable. The reader will probably be struck with what Mr. Garnett says about the little virtuous peace-making particle *if*, the very foundation of Tooke's theory of particles.

view, he has thus established, Mr. Tooke proceeds to draw certain conclusions.

1. Inasmuch as the parts of speech recognized in the present day were originally nouns and verbs, he argues that they must be considered as still retaining the same grammatical character, and that our actual classification of them under eight or nine different appellations is erroneous.

It is not difficult to see the fallacy of such reasoning.

It might as well be argued that because the chairs and tables in a room were made out of trees, the unshaped trunks of which may have formerly served the same purposes, they are still to be regarded as trees.

To classify words which, although originally used in one uniform way, have, in the progress of language, been employed, under modified forms, in different functions; and, further, to distinguish them by names indicative of those several functions, are surely expedients of no little value, nor would it be wise to confound things so essentially distinct on the ground of a common origin.

Our rude ancestors (if you will permit me to continue my parallel) might have used the trunk of one tree for a seat and that of another for a table, and perhaps interchangeably; but their successors after working up the trees into those two distinct pieces of furniture, would habitually regard each as adapted to its special purpose and

use it accordingly; nor would it be needful or beneficial in using it to advert to its pristine shape. The two diversely serviceable articles would stand in their estimation and in their vocabulary as widely different things notwithstanding their original existence in the same form.

So pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and the rest, since they are respectively serviceable to us in various ways and have their several grammatical relations with other parts of speech, are very properly ranged under different heads, although they may possibly all have been derived from nouns and verbs. Some one has styled them "nouns and verbs in disguise;" but if this view were correct and this phraseology received, it is obvious that the propriety and utility of classifying them by their distinguishing characteristics, i. e. by their several kinds of disguises, would remain unaffected.

Speech, according to Mr. Tooke's account of it, was originally a disjointed series of unconnected words, as insulated and as similar to each other in function as the stepping-stones formerly used for crossing rivers; but just as stones have been shaped and compacted into continuous bridges which save us from the jumping and jerking before required, so words have been pared down and connected together by abbreviation and modification into smooth and unbroken discourse.

It may be well to cite an instance of the way in

which this fallacy of the permanence of grammatical character is maintained in the Diversions of Purley.

The author enumerates the following words:—

Sheer, Sherd, Shred, Shore, Score, Short, Shorn, Shower, Share, Scar, Shard, Shire, Shirt, Skirt.

“All these,” he says, “so variously written and pronounced; and now so differently and distinctly applied; are yet merely the past participle of Scipan, *to Shear*, to cut, to divide, to separate. And they were formerly used indifferently.”\*

Granting for argument's sake the etymology here to be quite correct, I beg you will observe the explicit assertion that all the words he enumerates *are* the past participle: he does not say merely that they are *derived* from it but that they are the participle itself.

Surely, however, the difference between the grammatical function of the noun “shore” and that of the participle “shorn” is as great as can well be conceived. The manner in which the two words are connected with other words in discourse, which constitutes their grammatical character, is wholly diverse.

Should any one doubt whether I have construed his doctrine correctly, and have not taken a casual expression for more than it was intended to assert, I will cite another passage. In reply to a critic

\* Part 2, Chap. 4.

who maintains against him that Articles and Pronouns are neither Nouns nor Verbs, he rejoins, "I hope hereafter to satisfy the reader that they *are* nothing else and *can be* nothing else." \*

The author before us is remarkable for the carefulness with which he avoids throwing his doctrines into general propositions, and the preference he shows for adducing them as conclusions in particular cases, leaving his readers to make the general inferences for themselves. Although I am consequently unable to cite a passage containing an equally comprehensive assertion with that in which I have embodied his doctrine, I am fully justified in it, I think, by the preceding quotations, and accordingly the following may be regarded as an accurate summary of what he teaches respecting grammatical forms:—All the subordinate parts of speech, as set forth in modern grammars, are wrongly classed under the names of articles, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions and the like; they are all nouns or verbs and can be nothing else, the proof that they *are* so being that they originally *were* so.

2. But Mr. Tooke contends not only for permanence in the grammatical character of words, but, as I have explained in a preceding letter, for permanence in their meaning; two things which it

\* Diversions of Purley, Vol. i. p. 221, Chap. 8. The Italics are Mr. Tooke's.

is not always easy to keep separate, and which he has accordingly sometimes mixed together.

Here again it is to be regretted that he leaves his general doctrine to be gathered from particular cases.

One of the most striking instances in which he maintains it is the word "right," which he traces to the Latin *regitum* or *rectum*, whence he maintains that the meaning of *right* is always "ordered;" a right action is an ordered action, a right line is an ordered line.\*

Having already anticipated this instance in a former letter, I shall content myself with succinctly reminding you of the simple explanation and refutation of the fallacy which are afforded by considering what constitutes the signification of a word. Since the meaning is equivalent to the idea raised up in the mind by the word, and since it is quite obvious that when the expression "a right line" is used no one ever thinks of any order of which it has been the consequence; the epithet *right*, when applied to a line, cannot mean *ordered*, whatever may have been its origin.

The word *Scipan*, which has already come under review, may be taken as another instance. If, as Mr. Tooke says, all the fourteen words which he enumerates in connexion with that verb are only its past participle, it follows that they must all have one and the same meaning.

\* Diversions of Purley, Part 2, Chapter 1.



He avoids the inference, it is true, not very consistently or logically, by stating that the fourteen words, although all of them are merely the same past participle, are now differently and distinctly *applied*—thus establishing or trying to establish the distinction of which I exposed the fallacy in my last letter, between the meaning and the application of the same term.

The distinction is still more explicitly laid down in the following passage:

"LID LOT BLOT GLADE CLOUD	}	These words, though seemingly of such different significations, have all but one meaning; viz. <i>Covered, Hidden</i> . And the only difference is in their modern distinct application or different subaudition."*
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Which is really saying that although these five words have all of them but one meaning, they have, severally, different meanings.

Both the doctrines on which I have been animadverting, may be so clearly exhibited together in the case of the word *right* already brought under your notice, that you will pardon a little repetition.

In the first place *right*, according to our author, always retains its original grammatical character; it is always the past participle of the verb *regere*, and never can grammatically be any thing else. When by way of counsel you say to your friend "right yourself," although according to grammarians you clearly speak in the imperative mood,

\* Diversions of Purley, Part 2, Chapter 4.

Tooke will have it that it is the past participle and nothing else, setting at defiance the consideration that the injunction respects an act yet to be performed.

In the second place, *right* always retains its original signification, always means *ordered* whether applied to an action, to an argument, to a line, to an angle, or to an arm; and it can never have any other signification. Notwithstanding that your conduct may be right contrary [i. e. *directly contrary*] to what is ordered, it strictly follows from Tooke's premises that it is ordered to be contrary.

These two errors run through the whole of his speculations. The permanence of grammatical character and the permanence of meaning in words are perpetually either expressed or implied.

But on these parts of the subject, after my exposition of the second of them in a preceding letter, I will no longer dwell; what I have said being sufficient to indicate their places in the general doctrine.

I will proceed at once to the author's view of the relation between Etymology and the Philosophy of the Human Mind, and his other extraordinary doctrines respecting mental phenomena.

He broadly asserts that the operations, or what are called the operations, of the mind, are merely the operations of language.

The passage in which this assertion appears, is one of the most confused and the least intelligible

to be found in the whole book; and as he does not furnish the grounds on which he has come to so extraordinary a conclusion, it is not worth while attempting to discover and controvert them, or to disentangle the confusion pervading the statement.\*

It seems plain enough that the converse of Tooke's position is true, viz. that the operations of language, except in the purely physical incidents of speech, are essentially operations of the mind.

Language is obviously not some entity or agent distinct or independent of mental processes, but is in every case the result of them. Speech would be a series of unmeaning sounds unless certain objects, ideas, and emotions, were connected with it. Every word uttered presupposes at the least an idea, a feeling and a volition, all of which are states or operations of mind. Perceiving, remembering, feeling, willing, are all causes of speaking; and, at the same time, they are processes which are so far from being operations of language, that we are frequently conscious of them without reference to words.

\* "The business of the mind," he says, "as far as it concerns language, appears to me to be very simple. It extends no farther than to receive impressions, that is to have Sensations or Feelings. What are called its operations are merely the operations of Language. A consideration of Ideas or of the Mind, or of Things (relative to the Parts of Speech) will lead us no farther than to *Nouns*: i. e. the signs of those impressions, or names of Ideas."—*Diversions of Purley*, Vol. i. p. 49, 8vo. ed.

On the other hand what operation of language (if such an expression has any meaning except when referring to physical processes) can be named which is not an operation of the mind upon language, or with, or through language? Language is not an independent entity to perform operations of itself.

Abbreviation, the incident connected with language on which Tooke so especially dwells, is the result of mental acts of several kinds; and the efforts to accomplish it could not have that permanent effect on any word which he ascribes to them, without repeated operations of the mind in a number of human beings.

It may be stated in truth to be one great deficiency in Tooke's work, consequent on his turning away from mental philosophy because he had really no vocation for it, that he seems to be unaware or perpetually loses sight of the fact, that every change in a language is brought about by the action of circumstances on the minds of those who speak it, i. e. it is the direct result of mental operations; and he accordingly makes no attempt, except assigning the desire for despatch as the cause of abbreviations, to account for the various forms which the same word assumes or gives birth to. For example, he tells us, as we have seen, that fourteen words enumerated by him are only the past participle *Scipēd* of the verb *Scīpan* to shear, and that they were formerly used indifferently; but

he says nothing of the circumstances which led our ancestors, in the application of this verb, to change the *e* into *a* when they named a *share*, into *i* when they spoke of a *shire*, and into *o* when they wished to indicate a *shore*: yet each of these modifications must have had its peculiar mental cause.

He registers the changes and shows, or aims to show, the origin of the words from the same root, and there he leaves us, without affording us a glimpse of the way in which the modifications were effected.

No doubt to trace the causes of such modifications to any great extent, is difficult, not to say impossible; but at all events, if any step could be taken in that direction, it must be by a careful study of the movements of the human mind when engaged in the process of utterance — a task scarcely hitherto attempted.

Amongst the operations of the mind, which Tooke denies or converts into mere operations of language, is, as I have already intimated, Abstraction. In his views on this subject, I partly agree with him, although on different grounds, as will appear in the sequel.

His mode of proving that Abstraction is not an operation of the mind is remarkable.

It consists in showing that certain general terms, such as Act, Fact, Debt, Right, have been derived from past participles; or in his own language that they “are all merely participles

poetically embodied and substantiated by those who use them." \*

After a great number of instances of the kind mentioned, H says to F, " You have now instances of my doctrine, in, I suppose, about a thousand words. Their number may be easily increased. But, I trust, these are sufficient to discard that imagined *operation of the mind* which has been termed *Abstraction*: and to prove, that what we call by that name is merely one of the contrivances of Language for the purpose of more speedy communication." †

Now mark the reasoning here; Act, Fact, Debt and a thousand other words, are all merely past participles in the form of substantives; therefore there is no such operation of the mind as that which is termed Abstraction.

It is plain enough that here we have a complete *non sequitur*. Anyone may admit the derivations, and still hold that there is a process rightly called Abstraction.

If Tooke, instead of limiting his view to words, had ascended to the causes of all words, namely, our states of consciousness, his wider survey would have comprehended the truth.

The term Abstraction has been employed by philosophers (without always being aware of it) in two different ways; first, to denote the alleged

\* Diversions of Purley, Vol. ii. Chap. 2.

† Ibid. Vol. ii. p. 394.

formation of abstract ideas from the concrete; and, secondly, to designate the exclusive attention bestowed by the mind on some object or circumstance to the neglect of everything else.

Taking the first sense of the term, I quite concur in Tooke's doctrine, that no such abstraction takes place, and that we have no abstract ideas; but not for the reason he assigns. I concur in it because, on examining what passes in my own mind, I am conscious that when abstract terms are used, just the same kind of ideas come into my mind as when proper names are used; the only difference being one of limitation: that, in brief, all ideas being representative of objects or things, internal or external, and there being no abstract objects or things, ideas must be particular or concrete like their archetypes.

Tooke mistakes the kind of proof required to show that we do not and cannot form abstract ideas.\* Such proof must consist in an accurate

\* In a very defective and inaccurate account of the doctrines of Horne Tooke, put forth by Lord Brougham, the former is with singular infelicity represented as holding the existence of general and abstract ideas, the following being part of the account: "As for other ideas of a general or abstract nature, they are still later of being distinctly formed."—*Historical Sketches of Statesmen in the Time of Geo. III.* What says Tooke himself? Nothing surely can be more explicit: "They are not ideas but merely *terms*, which are *general* and *abstract*."—*Diversions*, Pt. 1, Chap. 2. He repeats this over and over again: in truth, a great part of his work is devoted to showing it by examples.

appreciation of what passes in our consciousness, not in any verbal derivations. It is altogether a mental investigation.

With regard to the second application of the term Abstraction (to which Tooke, if he recognizes it at all, does not distinctly advert), in the sense, namely, of partial attention, no one assuredly who looks into his own mind, or at the conduct of others, can entertain a doubt that there is such an operation; but, as I have already treated this part of the human constitution in its proper place, an exposition of the subject here would be redundant.

Another great error into which our author falls in regard to mental phenomena is his doctrine on the composition of terms.

Speaking of Locke he says, "the supposition [of a composition of ideas] is unnecessary. Every purpose for which the composition of ideas was imagined, being more easily and naturally answered by the *composition of Terms*."

What, nevertheless, does the latter phrase signify? On revolving the question in my own mind, I can find only three cases which can with the least propriety be so designated. (1) There is putting together the letters of which a term is formed, as making the word *sun* out of the letters *s, u, n*. (2) There is putting together two or more separate words so as to form one compound word, as *sun-flower*, a case which includes words formed by



prefixes and suffixes as *preposition*. (3) There is putting together words, so as to form sentences, as, *the sun-flower is full-blown*.

Having these meanings before us, let us examine Tooke's recommendation that in reading Locke we should substitute *composition of terms*, wherever the author has supposed a composition of ideas. Well, Locke tells us that the composition of ideas may be seen in the meaning of such words as *beauty, man, army*, which, according to him, denote complex ideas made up of simple ideas.

Let us then make the substitution recommended by Tooke in the case of the last-mentioned term, "*army*:"

How can *army* be said to be a composition of terms? In which of the senses already explained?

The word denotes a multitudinous thing, an assemblage of soldiers: all the putting together in the matter is the putting together of men. The composition of terms is here out of place; utterly inapplicable.

Although Locke's doctrine on the subject of general and abstract ideas is fundamentally such as I dissent from, yet he has here a manifest advantage over his critic. When the word *army* is used, what takes place is, that the image or idea of a number of congregated soldiers is raised up in the mind; and since soldiers actually so congregated form a composite body, the idea of that body may be said to be composite too.

But as to the mere word itself, there is no composition that can possibly be in question, and with regard to the application of a term to a compound object (if that were Tooke's meaning) it can, in no sense, be called a composition of the term.

The tendency in the author of "The Diversions" to reduce everything mental to an operation of language, is so strong, that he considers Locke's Essay—the whole of it—"as a philosophical account of the first sort of abbreviations in language," namely, abbreviations in terms; \* while in another place he describes the whole business of the Essay to be the consideration of the force of terms; † and, again, he gives it as his "opinion, that Mr. Locke in his Essay never did advance one step beyond the origin of Ideas and the composition of Terms." ‡ Further, "it is merely a Grammatical Essay, or a Treatise on Words, or on Language." § These seem to be, on the face of them, incongruous descriptions of the immortal work which they are intended to characterise; but it is not worth while attempting to reconcile them.

"Abbreviation in terms," whatever may have been intended by it, can legitimately mean nothing but shortening words; which is no more the object of consideration with Locke than the composition of terms which has just had our attention. In

\* Diversions of Purley, Vol. i. p. 29. † Ibid. p. 51.

‡ Ibid. p. 31.

§ Ibid. p. 30.

regard to "the force of terms," the phrase is equivalent to "the meaning of terms," or to some quality of the meaning, and of course the consideration of it can scarcely fail to be mingled with that of mental processes: but to represent the consideration of that one quality as the whole business of a work which takes into view a large number of the most important questions of intellectual philosophy, shows an incapacity in the author of the representation to comprehend what the *Essay on Human Understanding* has effected. Valuable as its third Book is that great work is assuredly something more than a mere *Treatise on Words*.

I will extend this notice of Tooke's psychological errors by citing one more instance of his tendency to reduce mental processes to what he calls operations of language. He will not allow that affirming and denying are anything else than verbal.

Doubtless, language is usually employed to make known that we do affirm or deny; and so far, affirmation and denial are in a verbal form: but words could not be put together in these modes without previous mental acts which they are employed to indicate.

We discern that a thing has a property or that it has not; and this discernment, positive or negative, is expressed in a proposition, whence the proposition is said to affirm or deny; but if there were no mental act or state prior to the utterance of the words and represented by them, they would

be unmeaning sounds; or, to speak more correctly, were there no act of discernment, then no proposition affirming or denying could be uttered. For these reasons mental affirmation and denial (whatever objection may lie against the mere phraseology) are real facts equally with verbal affirmation and denial, and are perfectly distinct from them. It seems to be the fate of Tooke, as soon as he touches on the Mind, to plunge into error.

## LETTER X.

LANGUAGE (*in continuation*).

IT is a logical consequence of my doctrine regarding the specific function of words in intellectual operations, and what constitutes the perfection of language as an intellectual instrument, that I should dissent from the extravagant powers and qualities which have been ascribed to words in their individual capacity and in virtue of their etymological origin.

Perhaps I cannot better show the extreme, as I think it, to which this lavish attribution has been carried, than by citing passages from a recent work of considerable merit and popularity.

"There are few," says the author, "who would not readily acknowledge that in worthy books is laid up and hoarded the greater part of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge which the world has accumulated; and that chiefly by aid of these they are handed down from one generation to another. My purpose in the present and some succeeding lectures, which by the kindness of your Principal, I shall have the opportunity of addressing to you here, is to press on you something

different from this; namely, that not in books only, which all acknowledge, nor yet in connected oral discourse, but often also in words contemplated each one apart from others, and by itself, there are boundless stores of moral and historic truth, and no less of passion and imagination, laid up,—lessons of infinite worth which we may derive from them, if only our attention is awakened to their existence.” — *On the Study of Words*, by R. C. Trench, page 1.

Another writer of reputation speaks in the same strain :

“ A language,” he says, “ will often be wiser, not merely than the vulgar, but even than the wisest of those who speak it. Being like amber in its efficacy to circulate the electric spirit of truth,\* it is also like amber in embalming and preserving

\* Unfortunately for this similitude amber, although an electric, is a non-conductor of electricity : it stops the circulation of the electric fluid. But the whole comparison is very confused and imperfectly brought out. Amber is represented as circulating not electricity (which was the obvious design) but the spirit of truth, and as preserving and embalming not material objects but the relics of wisdom. Even if we rectify the comparison, the first material fact will still remain incorrect ; and, as to the second, since amber, according to common description, is found to enclose nothing better than leaves and insects, we obtain but a sorry counterpart to the relics of the wisdom of our ancestors. The whole passage is an apt illustration of what I shall hereafter insist upon at greater length—the peril of pushing such analogies beyond a single point, in the vain endeavour to make them elucidate truths on which they are incapable of throwing light.

the relics of ancient wisdom, although one is not seldom puzzled to decipher its contents. Sometimes it locks up truths which were once well known, but which in the course of ages have passed out of sight and been forgotten. In other cases it holds the germs of truth, of which, though they were never plainly discerned, the genius of its framers caught a glimpse in a happy moment of divination. A meditative man cannot refrain from wonder, when he digs down to the deep thought lying at the root of many a metaphorical term employed for the designation of spiritual things, even of those with regard to which professing philosophers have blundered grossly; and often it would seem as though rays of truths, which were still below the intellectual horizon, had dawned on the imagination as it was looking up to heaven." — *Guesses at Truth*, 1st Series, p. 333, 4th ed.

These passages appear to me to contain a most singular misrepresentation of an interesting subject, and if they are not diametrically opposed to the sober truth, they greatly exaggerate the little foundation which there is for them. They also appear to mix up the case of metaphorical symbolization with that of etymological significance.

A word by itself, contemplated apart from other words, cannot surely be said with correctness (except in certain particular cases which will be hereafter expressly noticed) to give us any information, yield us any truth whatever beyond

its ordinary meaning, much less to impart any profound wisdom or contain lessons of infinite worth. All other knowledge we may happen to possess or can obtain about it, is historical knowledge which has been or must be collected from "books or connected discourse," whether oral or written.

Thus the origin of the word and the various meanings which it may have borne at various times, are directly or indirectly matters of history, circumstances obviously not to be gathered from contemplating the word alone and apart, but to be learned from extant records, and, in every case, by means of that combination of words with words in propositions, which, strangely enough, in one of the quotations before us is expressly excluded. The particulars in question cannot with any verisimilitude be described as laid up in the word; they are simply incidents connected with it, and to be collected like other past incidents from suitable evidence.

The author of the Lectures proceeds, in the same style of exaggeration, to say, "Many a single word is itself a concentrated poem, having stores of poetical thought and imagery laid up in it. Examine it, and it will be found to rest on some deep analogy of things natural and things spiritual, bringing those to illustrate and to give an abiding form and body to these."

He illustrates his position by the word "tribu-



lation," which, he says, is derived from the Latin "tribulum," "the threshing instrument, or roller, by which the Romans separated the corn from the husks; and 'tribulatio' in its primary significance was the act of this separation. But some Latin writer of the Christian Church appropriated the word and image for the setting forth of a higher truth; and sorrow and distress and adversity being the appointed means for the separating in men of their chaff from their wheat, of whatever in them was light and trivial and poor, from the solid and the true, therefore he called these sorrows and griefs 'tribulations,' 'threshings,' that is, of the inner spiritual man, without which there could be no fitting him for the heavenly garner."

Here, according to my views, we have a good instance of what a word singly and apart cannot do. We can learn nothing from the term *tribulation* considered by itself, apart from external evidence; or, in different language, it can suggest nothing to us, except accidentally, beyond that mental condition which it simply denotes.

As we are of course supposed to understand ordinary language, we know what the word means when we happen to meet with it; that is to say, it raises up in our minds the idea of a peculiar kind of distress. If we proceed to discover that the term is derived from the name of a Roman agricultural implement, we must gain the informa-

tion from external sources: if we further learn that it was analogically appropriated by a Christian writer and that "this deeper religious use of the word tribulation was unknown to classical, that is to heathen antiquity, and belongs exclusively to Christian writers," all this, supposing we admit it to be unquestionably true, is likewise information drawn from the records of the past *about* the word: it is not truth laid up *in* the word and extracted from it by contemplating it by itself and apart.

The author appears to me to blend two very different things, to mistake the knowledge which is to be learned from various sources respecting a word and its acceptations, or respecting the objects denoted by it, in different ages, for something which is intrinsic and laid up in the bare term itself. Such knowledge may be properly described as being accumulated about the word not contained in it nor drawn from it.

Investigating the history of a word, i. e. of the modes in which it has been employed, may lead us to acquire a good deal of knowledge connected with the term, but in no other way than investigating the history of an article of dress, a social custom, or a useful implement, may lead us to gather much information connected with the object of our inquiry.

We have elaborate historical accounts, for example, of the various machinery formerly resorted

to in grinding corn down to the latest inventions, interspersed with episodes on the particular kinds of food of different nations and on the commerce in grain. Hence if the historian of these inventions were disposed, as most historians are, to extol the subject of his researches, he might say that boundless stores of historic truth are laid up in a mill-stone; and the assertion would be quite as appropriate and correct as the doctrine that they are laid up in a word: but this, I apprehend, would scarcely be accepted as solving the ancient problem of seeing into that visually impenetrable body.

Nevertheless it seems to me, with great respect for the authors of the theory, that looking into a word for past wisdom is much like looking into a mill-stone for the history of grinding.

There are cases, nevertheless, in which, as I have already admitted, words may be said with more correctness to contain knowledge when considered singly as words in their literal meaning; cases where the very presence of certain terms in the vocabulary of a people, may indicate modes of thinking, feeling, and acting, for which we have no other evidence, or which lie beyond the evidence we possess.

But even here disconnected words are only on a level with other insulated relics of antiquity, implements and arms and sculptures, which have been dug up from buried ruins or handed down

to us by accident, and which serve to give us a few glimpses into the story of past times.

The most striking instances of this kind of lingual evidence are when we have no information regarding a nation or tribe, but some relics of its vocabulary, and when from the terms contained in that wreck of a vocabulary, or from the absence even of certain classes of terms, we are able to infer that the people were agricultural or nomadic, or warlike or peaceful. And even with regard to nations of whom we have historical records, a word may indicate some feature in their social condition or manners or customs or fortunes, of which their written annals furnish no explicit account.

All these circumstances in the past state of a people, are evidently inferred from the mere existence of the words in the vocabulary which has come down to us ; and we may speak of them with sufficient accuracy as information furnished by the words considered singly and apart ; but at the same time we must admit that the information so gathered is in the very nature of the case exceedingly meagre at the best ; so meagre, indeed, though valuable in its place, that we cannot for a moment suppose it to be all that was in the view of those writers who have so highly extolled the deep wisdom and concentrated poetry laid up in solitary terms ; who have eulogized words contemplated "apart from others and by themselves,"

as boundless stores of moral and historic truth and pregnant with lessons of infinite worth.\*

\* The lecturer quotes Niebuhr to show the knowledge which words can furnish, and particularly the circumstance that while Latin and Greek correspond closely in their agricultural terms, they differ altogether in those denoting the operations and incidents of war ; and hence the inference is drawn (how I do not exactly discern) that the Italians once stood in a similar relation to the Greeks as the Normans to the Saxons in England. More recent comparative philologists than Niebuhr maintain, on the other hand, that the Roman language is as perfectly original as the Greek and the Sanscrit, and hence the assertion that the Roman people were a mixed nation "is deprived of its linguistic support." "Even Niebuhr's ingenious hypothesis—one which O. Müller has adopted—that the names of the objects of peace belong to the Greek and those of a warlike character to the Italian portion of Latin, does not hold good after comparative researches. The inhabitants of Italy share the names of the peaceful household, not only with the Greeks, but with almost all the nations of the common stock. There is, therefore, nothing especially Greek in them. Words for the business of war and warlike implements are also hardly to be found in the cognate languages ; and every nation forms them in part herself. We may, therefore, say that these words of the Latin language are not German, not Slavonic, with just as much right as when we maintain that they are not Greek. Much of this points to the fact, that the cognate nations were, during the period of their living together, more addicted to peaceful occupations than to warlike pursuits, and that they marked each of the weapons which at the time of their separation they used against each other with a particular name."—*The Results of Comparative Philology, by Dr. G. Curtius, Eng. Trans.* p. 12. *Non nostrum tantas componere lites.* I have introduced this extract for the purpose of showing, not only the uncertainty which may belong to the grounds afforded to us by philology, but also the vague and scanty inferences which we are able to draw from them.

Taken as a whole the study of the Origin and Progress of

Although single words, considered apart in their literal signification, may thus constitute grounds for inferring certain features in the condition of those nations to whose vocabulary they belong, yet inasmuch as they cannot in any proper sense be said to present us with either deep wisdom or condensed poetry, we must seek further for these treasures, if they exist at all, in the figurative character of the words; to which, indeed, we are expressly referred for them by the authors before us. Let us therefore inquire whether they can be found in the metaphors sometimes contained in such single words so considered apart; and this involves the general question of the value of analogical applications of terms designating material operations and events, to such as are mental.

As the point is one respecting which precise thinking is exceedingly desirable, I purpose to take some pains to exhibit it in what appears to me the proper light. In the first place, it may be

Languages is doubtless a noble and an interesting pursuit, and may throw light on the unity and separation and migration of the former inhabitants of the earth, as well as on the mental processes concerned in the evolution and vicissitudes of human speech. It may also present us with detached intimations of manners, customs, and modes of thinking; but I have yet to learn that it can supply, or even do much to illustrate, trains of national events when historical documents fail; or furnish us with instructive information of the conduct, condition, and career of nations, which to *be* instructive in any high degree must be definite and connected. I can nowhere find the alleged "vast harvests of historic lore garnered often in single words."

remarked, that we human beings are under the absolute necessity of applying terms borrowed from outward objects to designate our mental operations and affections: we have no other possible resource when we wish to speak of them to others; and there is in human nature a general power of discerning and relishing analogies of all kinds—analogs between the phenomena of the outward and those of the inward world, as well as between the phenomena belonging respectively to each.

The employment of terms denoting external objects to designate figuratively the phenomena of consciousness being thus unavoidable in the ordinary intercourse of life, and being consonant with our natural propensities and endowments, any new application of a word in this way cannot be truly regarded as, in general, indicating any deep wisdom or any great stretch of poetical imagination.

Nor can it be so regarded in the particular case of past times, even the most remote, when there was doubtless a greater call for the transference of terms from material to mental phenomena.

The farther we push our investigations into our own language (which I instance in order to limit the discussion), the clearer will be the truth that it originated in the scanty vocabulary of a rude tribe; scanty, because the knowledge to be uttered was in the same condition. It was the very meagreness of their language that, as their knowledge widened, seems to have forced the barbarous speakers into

those metaphors which are now ascribed to profound thought or strong imagination; but which resulted, for the most part, from the urgent desire for utterance, in the dearth of literal phraseology, seizing hold from sheer necessity of obvious analogies to accomplish its purpose.\*

In other cases, although comparatively few, such metaphors have doubtless originated in mere fondness for figurative expression, or in the glow of passion, or in the leisurely play of fancy delighting in its own creations.

In the second place, necessary as the transfer of terms from matter to mind is, and pleasing as in every stage of civilization such metaphors when newly and happily applied may be, they do not and cannot convey any knowledge of the mental states which they are employed to indicate or designate, beyond, in each case, raising up in the mind of the hearer a conception of the precise mental state intended by the speaker.

It may be laid down as a law in the science of mind (and a most important law it is), that no analogy between mental phenomena and material phenomena can make us better acquainted with

\* It has been shown by recent philologists that some nations whom we regard as uncivilised have a great many synonyms, many words for the same object or event; but this is no real store of language from which names for new objects may be taken without effort, and does not militate against the position in the text. On the accession of fresh knowledge, such a nation would still have suitable terms to seek.



either. Such analogies can only help us to each other's meaning, or fix it more deeply in the memory, or excite us to think on the separate characteristics of the two things brought into comparison.

This may be a startling, but it is a true and by no means a novel doctrine. It may be found in Descartes, as was long ago pointed out by Mr. Stewart, who, while giving an account of that philosopher's opinions, has expressed his own view of the subject with clearness and precision in the following words:—

“He [Descartes] was led to perceive with the evidence of consciousness, that the attributes of Mind were still more clearly and distinctly knowable than those of Matter; and that in studying the former, so far from attempting to explain them by analogies borrowed from the latter, our chief aim ought to be, to banish as much as possible from the fancy every analogy, and even every analogical expression, which, by inviting the attention abroad, might divert it from its proper business at home.”\* In a subsequent page Mr. Stewart proceeds to add, “Descartes laid down as a first principle that *nothing comprehensible by the imagination can be at all subservient to the knowledge of Mind*; and that the sensible images involved in all our common forms of speaking concerning its opera-

\* Dissertation on the Progress of Metaphysical Philosophy, p. 60.

tions, are to be guarded against with the most anxious care, as leading to confound, in our apprehensions, two classes of phenomena, which it is of the last importance to distinguish accurately from each other.”\*

In the next place it may be remarked that if such metaphors could convey any knowledge of the nature or laws of mental phenomena, or assist us in any way to comprehend those phenomena better, there is another feature belonging to them which would inevitably render their assistance of little worth: it is, that the analogy seldom extends beyond a single point, or is at all events exceedingly vague and imperfect when carried farther; and if we attempt it we are in danger of losing ourselves in inconsistency or confusion. Metaphors are dangerous tools to handle, if handled long.

\* Dissertation, page 61.

On carefully reading over the Second Meditation of Descartes, I do not find the doctrine to be so fully and so explicitly enunciated by him as it appears in the language of Mr. Stewart, but it is there in substance. The passages on which the latter philosopher grounded his representation are the following:—

“Itaque cognosco, nihil eorum quæ possum *Imaginatione* comprehendere, ad hanc quam de me habeo notitiam pertinere; mentemque ab illis diligentissime esse avocandum, ut suam ipsa naturam quam distinctissime percipiat.” Descartes had already explained in what sense he used the term *Imagination*: “Nihil est *imaginari* quam rei corporeæ figuram seu imaginem contemplari.” This limited meaning of *Imagination* must be borne in mind, otherwise the doctrine may be misconstrued.

In order to illustrate both this and the preceding remark, I will take the analogy which is dwelt upon at so much length and with so much fervour by the intelligent lecturer whom I have before quoted, and which is contained in the word "tribulation." As I have so recently extracted the passage referred to, I will beg you to turn to it that you may fully enter into the following comments.

The vagueness and imperfection of the analogy will be seen from a brief analysis.

1. In the case of wheat previously to its being threshed, there are obviously three things adhering together, the straw, the grain, and the chaff.

In the human counterpart there are, according to the representation, the spiritual man, his solid qualities, and his light qualities. In this comparison there is certainly to be discovered a rude but only a rude kind of resemblance between the objects compared.

2. Let us proceed next to consider the material operation. The threshing of wheat consists in loosening from each other all the coadherent parts, leaving the grain and chaff mixed together it may be, but disunited, and the straw separated from both, with the exception of the unremovable husks.

In the mental process there is nothing corresponding to this: the salutary effect of adversity, as intended to be shown by the metaphor, ought to consist in loosening the spiritual man not from

*all* his qualities light and solid (which would indeed reduce him to a mere man of straw), but only from his light and trivial qualities. The extrusion of both kinds out of him, which would be needful to complete the analogy with the process undergone by the wheat, would be not a moral purgation but a spiritual extinction.

To add to the discrepancy and confusion which almost always attend pushing a resemblance too far, the spiritual man, in the final sentence of the quotation, is suddenly transformed from being the straw — the holder of the metaphorical grain — into the very wheat itself: he is spoken of at least as being *fitted for the garner*, and you are compelled, in consonance with that description, to consider him, for the time being, as the grain, unless, to escape from the inconsistency, you seek refuge in the sack in which the wheat may (conveniently for the metaphor's sake) be presumed to be deposited, and which, in this rhetorical strait, may be taken to shadow forth the human being. But, alas! even here, as the sack itself has not been threshed, a rock lies in our course, and the metaphor is still fated to be wrecked. *Incidit in Scyllam qui vult vitare Charybdim.*

So difficult is it to manage these analogies at all, if we push them beyond a single point of resemblance, (in itself perhaps somewhat indefinite), or aspire to make them subservient to the exposition of mental phenomena. The attempt to

extract knowledge or wisdom from such a source must inevitably fail. How can there be deep wisdom (other considerations apart) in an analogy which breaks down? Were it possible (which I venture to think it is not) that such a treasure could lurk in the figure, it could be only in virtue of the apt tallying of the subjects compared, the close correspondence of the several physical circumstances adduced for the purpose of illustration, with the several mental circumstances to be illustrated.

In ordinary cases all this criticism of a metaphorical passage which could be disposed of in half a sentence, might appear to be only "breaking a butterfly upon a wheel;" but it is not (you will observe) merely the correctness of the figures that is here in question, but also the justness of extolling them in the large, lofty, and extravagant terms employed. It is a question of philosophical truth even more than of purity of taste.

Pray do not mistake the position I have taken up. I by no means intend to deny that great depth of thought and richness of imagery may be connected with the word "tribulation" or any similar term, or with the analogy presented by its etymological origin. These however, according to my view, are adventitious or rather adscititious, supplied or gathered together by the meditator himself; and so far from being extracted out of the word, they are and must be brought to the naked

term and thrown around it by his learning and imagination.\*

Nor will I deny that analogies of this kind, particularly when they are vague or remote, may be readily associated with profound emotions; remembering the observation of Coleridge, "that deep feeling has a tendency to combine with obscure ideas, in preference to clear and distinct notions."†

As a conclusion to the subject, I must solicit your attention for a moment to a judicious recommendation made by Descartes and confirmed by Stewart, which you may possibly have overlooked; and I do so for the purpose of contrasting it with the doctrine on which I have been commenting.

The recommendation referred to is contained in a passage already cited, and is to the effect that, in treating of the mind, we should banish as far as practicable analogies and analogical expressions. The wisdom of this, against which the first impulse of many may be to rebel, will be more clearly seen the more it is reflected upon. I

\* The passages on which I am commenting seem to be little more than a reproduction, as a grave philosophical speculation in reference to words, of what appears in Shakespeare as a play of fancy in reference to natural objects.

"And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing."

*As you like it*, Act II. Scene I.

† The Friend, Vol. I. p. 177.

would follow it up by observing, that when the transfer of a term from material to mental phenomena has been once effectually accomplished and generally adopted, the sooner the analogy drops out of the mind and leaves the expression a literal one, the better for precise thinking and accurate investigation. The more completely, for example, we forget the pedigree of the word "tribulation," when we make use of the term, and the more exclusively we think of the mental state itself and its immediate accompaniments, the more clearly (as I conceive, in direct contrariety to the lecturer) shall we discern its nature, its causes, its effects—in brief, understand all about it. The imperfect analogy of the threshing implement can tend only, as it appears to me and as I have endeavoured to point out, to confuse the mind with incongruous or ill-assorted images, "similes unlike" and "passages that lead to nothing." A great part of the loose thinking (if thinking it may be called\*) which so generally prevails in regard to the phenomena of consciousness, is made up of vague tropes, in which the mind seems to repose, without going or seeking to go farther.

Figurative language in description, in rhetoric, in sentiment, in the expression of feeling, in rousing to action, is, when it chances to be happy, prolific of delight, and powerful in the impressions

\* "How many never think who think they do!"—*Jane Taylor*.

which it leaves; but in the communication of knowledge, the finest and best fitting metaphor, pleasing as it may be to the imagination, can do nothing better than convey to the hearer and vividly imprint on his mind, the precise idea which it was intended to indicate, while it is perpetually liable to become the substitute of the reality which it shadows forth.

There is another passage, in an earlier work of Mr. Stewart's, which so happily corroborates the views maintained in the preceding discussion, that I cannot forbear to present it to you here. It will form an appropriate close to the present letter.

After quoting as examples of metaphorical language the expressions "*the morning of our days ; the chequered condition of human life ; the lights of science ; the rise and the fall of empires ;*" he proceeds, "In all these instances, the metaphors are happy and impressive; but whatever advantage the poet or the orator may derive from them, the most accurate analysis of the different subjects thus brought into contact will never enable the philosopher to form one new conclusion concerning the nature either of the one or of the other. I mention this particularly, because it has been too little attended to by those who have speculated concerning the powers of the Mind. The words which denote these powers are all borrowed (as I have already observed repeatedly) from material objects, or from physical operations, and it seems



to have been very generally supposed, that this implied something common in the nature or attributes of Mind and of Matter. Hence the real origin of those analogical theories concerning the former, which, instead of advancing our knowledge with respect to it, have operated more powerfully than any other circumstances whatever to retard the progress of that branch of science."\*

\* Philosophical Essays by Dugald Stewart, p. 270, 3rd ed.

## LETTER XI.

LANGUAGE (*in continuation*).

I HAVE been hitherto occupied, chiefly at least, with words regarded singly or apart from their connexion with other words.

I have next to consider the second question before proposed, namely, how words are affected in their signification when they are combined in sentences.

In a former letter (First Series) I endeavoured to show, that common names and abstract terms differ from proper names, not in the character of the representations or ideas suggested, but in the more limited range of suggestion appertaining to the latter.

Precisely the same difference may be remarked between a word when standing alone and when united with other words to form a sentence, or in composition. In the latter case, the range of the ideas raised up by the word is much narrower than in the former.

This may be exemplified by a very simple

instance. If some one standing at the window of the room where I am sitting utters the sentence, "I see a man walking through a field," a picture immediately presents itself to my mind representing a man in the act of walking and a field in which he walks. The man must be conceived or mentally depicted as engaged in that particular act in that particular sort of ground.

But if the supposed spectator standing at the window, uses the shorter phrase, "I see a man," I am by no means under the same restrictions. I may then think of any man in any position or attitude or act; either sitting or standing or running, either in the field or in the lane or in the garden, in short as doing anything anywhere within view of the window.

It is to be remarked, too, that if any of these my conceptions should be expressed in words, they would necessarily take the form of a sentence or proposition not less complete than the one which I first supposed to be uttered, and having a meaning equally definite.

On this account if it were advisable to confound under one name things essentially distinct, and most usefully discriminated, it would be nearer the truth to say that every word is a sentence, than, as an able and ingenious writer contends,\* that every sentence is a word. Even a proper

\* Mr. B. H. Smart in his *Sematology* and other Works.

name brings to mind very variable things, none of which could be described except by a proposition.

For instance, the name of Sir James Mackintosh, whose memoirs I have just been reading, when I dwell upon it, brings that distinguished man to my mind as sitting in a particular room where I once met with him when he was making a temporary sojourn in Yorkshire; or as I saw him and listened to his eloquence at a meeting in London on behalf of the Greeks; or as I heard him speaking in the House of Commons: and in the same way, every name that denotes an individual person or thing brings to your recollection, if you pause upon it, that person or thing in some particular attitude or employment or condition, or with some particular accompaniments, which could be told only in one or more sentences.

That when a speaker utters a sentence instead of a word, or, more correctly, when after uttering a word as "man" he proceeds to use it in a sentence by describing a man walking in a field, he thereby limits the variety of conceptions raised up by the word in the hearer, is a truth which deserves to be further elucidated. Nor is it less worthy of attention that the restrictive action is the same as ensues when a common term is replaced by a proper name. The two cases, indeed, may be presented in combination.

Had the speaker in the preceding hypothetical instance, after telling me there was a man, and

that the man was walking in a field, proceeded to say that it was a cornfield, and that the man who was walking there was my servant John Jones, my conception would have been still more narrowed by the description of the field and by the proper name, than it had been by the previous particulars; and yet, after all these limitations, it is to be remarked, that I should be at liberty to conceive the object with considerable variations of appearance. I might conceive John walking rapidly or walking slowly, in a cap or a hat or bareheaded, with a coat or without one, singing or silent, smiling or serious.

Thus the real effect produced on the representations raised up by a word, when other words are added to it so as to form a sentence, is a limitation of possible conceptions, but not an exclusion of variety, corresponding in this respect to the effect of replacing a common term by a proper name.

This explanation of the matter will perhaps serve to show the real value of a passage in Dugald Stewart's *Philosophical Essays* of a somewhat questionable character. In his "Essay on the Tendency of some late Philological Speculations," he asserts "that our words when examined separately are often as completely insignificant as the letters of which they are composed; deriving their meaning solely from the connexion or relation in which they stand to others. Of this a very obvious example

occurs in the case of terms which have a variety of acceptations, and of which the import, in every particular application, must be collected from the whole sentence of which they form a part."

If we suppose that in this passage Mr. Stewart intended to assert that all the words in a sentence are individually insignificant, a curious result will ensue. It will follow that words, every one of which is without meaning when standing alone, must give and take meaning reciprocally when they are combined in a sentence: each must give what it has not got. Surely a term completely insignificant can stand in no relation of meaning to other terms equally insignificant, and can derive no meaning from them. We must suppose, then, that Mr. Stewart intended to say that some of the words in a sentence are or may be insignificant when considered by themselves, and are made significant by other words which are already so: and to exemplify this he cites the case of words having *various* significations, his reasoning on this supposition being, as far as I can discern, that because the meaning of some words which have a variety of significations is determined by the context, therefore the meaning of those which are non-significant is determined in the same way.

He has, I think, mixed up two cases and not accurately stated either of them. The first case, as given, is wrong in point of fact. Words taken separately, so far from being insignificant, raise up,

or may raise up, as I have just explained, a wider range of conceptions than when they are combined; and the precise effect of one word being joined to others is not that meaning is imparted to what was before destitute of it, but that the word is thereby limited in its latitude of suggestion.

But the case of a word with two or more meanings is a different and more complicated one. When a term has two distinct acceptations, the meanings of the other words associated with it undoubtedly determine in which of the two senses — both being present to the mind — it is to be taken; or they cause one of the senses, perhaps, to be suggested alone; and they at the same time limit the latitude of suggestion which the word possesses in the sense so determined.

In no case, however, can words be insignificant except from the ignorance of the hearer or reader — which is not here in question.

Tooke puts the matter in very positive terms: "There is not," he says, "nor is it possible there should be, a word in any language, which has not a complete meaning and signification even when taken by itself."\*

This kind of determination of the import of a word employed in several distinct acceptations, or (as the fact is more properly described when certain cases are spoken of) in several distinct modes,

\* Letter to Dunning.

is a pervading feature in language, far beyond what is generally understood and far beyond what Mr. Stewart seems to have apprehended.

Language would be overburthened with words if there did not prevail a sort of economy by using the same term for various purposes; not any intentional economy, but an economy arising from several causes, and principally from speakers laying hold instinctively of the first known term which presents itself, to serve their purpose of conveying to others, although it may be irregularly and figuratively and elliptically, what they wish to express.

The circumstance here described forms, in truth, one of the most important points to be attended to in the use of words in combination; and is especially important in all philosophical speculations. This will appear manifest on taking a cursory glance at some examples of the fact that the same word is made to do different duties in different positions, or under different circumstances, and frequently without any recognised or even suspected change of meaning.

In a preceding letter (Second Series) when treating of what are styled necessary truths, I pointed out one mode in which we are accustomed to do this, unconsciously making the same epithet serve different purposes, by placing it in situations where it cannot directly qualify the noun to which it is joined, and can be regarded only as an elliptical



indication of what is meant : and by way of illustration I showed how in thus economising language, we apply the term *criminal* both to the act of a culprit and to the court in which he is tried.

This is a common, and probably an unavoidable, expedient, without which our vocabularies might become cumbrous and unwieldy ; but it is nevertheless a defect in language as an intellectual instrument, and great care is required, I scarcely need to say, in guarding against the natural consequences of it in our reasonings. We must sedulously and rigorously avoid drawing inferences which would be quite correct were the epithet intended, as in ordinary cases, to qualify the noun associated with it, but which would be utterly erroneous because it was intended for an entirely different office.

Such inferences, I have shown, have been made from the term "necessary" when translocated from its proper position and elliptically applied. The ignorance or the oversight of this kind of translocation and elliptical usage on the part of Leibnitz, Kant and other philosophers, has resulted in their bewildering themselves with difficulties about necessary truths and *à priori* principles, which admit of the simplest solution when this expedient of language is once thoroughly understood and appreciated.\*

\* See the Second Series of these Letters, p. 110.

As what I have ventured to name the translocation of terms, has not, I think, received that share of attention, since I first pointed it out to the notice of thinkers, which its importance deserves; and as its bearings on philosophical speculation seem to have been little understood, I will take occasion to repeat briefly here how it affects the question of what have been called *necessary truths*.

The phrase *necessary truth* or proposition is, in regard to the inappropriate allocation of the epithet, precisely on a level with the phrase *criminal court*.

By the latter expression we do not intend to charge a court of law with crime, but we intend to convey to the hearer that it is a court in which crimes, or culprits accused of crimes, are tried. Thus the epithet criminal is not appropriately placed, but is transferred for the sake of brevity from its proper position before acts or agents, and prefixed to the noun *court* to which it is really inapplicable.

What is here so clearly seen and acknowledged has place equally in the phrase "necessary truth." A truth is simply a true proposition, or the knowledge which a true proposition expresses; and when it is styled a necessary truth, the meaning is that the proposition expresses a necessary fact. It is the *fact* which is necessary not the knowledge of the fact, nor yet the proposition embodying the knowledge; just as it is the culprit that is criminal not the court which tries him nor the hall

in which he is arraigned: and the reason (it may be added) why the fact is styled *necessary* is, that it includes conditions which are essential to each other's existence; or it exists only as inseparably connected, both in reality and in conception, with some other fact.

In this view there is no longer any question about such things as the necessary cognitions of the German philosophers. Certain facts are discerned by us to be necessary, as certain lines are discerned to be straight or curved, and certain angles to be acute or obtuse, simply because they are so: and, setting custom aside, it would be as philosophically correct to designate a proposition about lines a straight or curved proposition, and a proposition about angles an acute or obtuse proposition, as a proposition about necessary facts a necessary proposition or a necessary truth.

The word *fact* itself, of which I have here made so free a use, will exemplify another shape which this sort of verbal economy assumes; the shape, in truth, of a solecism, in which a noun is made a party to the contradiction of its own meaning by the epithets annexed to it. The old logicians called it "*oppositum in appposito*," and "*contradictio in adjecto*."\* No one hesitates to speak of pretended

\* "*Siquando non explicitè ponitur hujusmodi negatio sed in verborum saltem significata implicate lateat; dicitur implicari contradictio, ut si dicatur Homo irrationalis, quod sensu implicat Hominem et non hominem. Atque hæc dici solet contradictio in adjecto; item oppositum in appposito.*"—*Institutio Logicæ per J. Wallis, Lib. I. Cap. 16.*

or fictitious or false facts. Thus it was the saying of a well-known physician, that there are more false facts current in the world than false theories.

Now facts are obviously realities which exist or have existed, and a contradiction is involved in styling them otherwise; but to be debarred from coupling the word with the epithets cited or other similar adjuncts would occasion great prolixity. Although it is manifestly not false facts but false assertions regarding facts, which the physician affirmed to be more current in the world than false theories, yet to be obliged to express all this in full would render the communication of thought exceedingly operose.

Another economising expedient in language occurs when two things being of necessity combined in one phrase, we use the phrase sometimes for one, sometimes for the other. In the 12th Letter of the First Series I pointed out this duplicity in meaning in the case of the word *perception*, which sometimes designates the act of perceiving, and at other times the object perceived. The word cannot be used without really implying both act and object, as the former cannot exist without the latter; but it may be so employed for only one as to lead to false conclusions; a liability which I have explained in the letter referred to.

The word *cognition* may be adduced as an example under this head. It implies both the act

of cognising and the fact cognised. When writers speak of a dormant cognition or an innate cognition of which there is no consciousness, they appear to drop the mental act and consider alone the substance (so to speak) of what is cognised. But cognition being the conscious act of an intelligent being, it cannot be dormant, or laid up in a repository. The fact itself may exist dormant enough, that is, unknown or unperceived, but for the existence of a *cognised* fact—a fact in the condition of being known—a knower is requisite; nor can we consistently speak of a cognition apart from him. It undoubtedly saves trouble to use the word first for one purpose and then for the other, but it is, as modern speculation shows, a perilous expedient.

The great lesson to be learned from such instances is to be continually on our guard in reasoning, so as not to draw any inferences from elliptical expressions or translocated epithets, or a one-sided use of two-sided designations, which could not be legitimately drawn if all the ellipses were supplied, the translocations readjusted, and both sides of ambiguous phrases brought into view.

Such economical expedients in language as I have here described unavoidably occasion a good deal of trouble and perplexity to lexicographers in their definitions and explanations. But inasmuch as the business of a lexicographer is to explain all the modes in which a word is used by good

writers, they are difficulties not to be avoided without depreciating the value of his work. Throwing together a word and its paronyms, tracing its derivation, assigning its radical import, and then subjoining passages from various authors in which the terms are variously applied; and doing all this without any attempt to point out their different shades of signification, the elliptical modes in which they are employed, and the deviation in meaning of the paronyms from the principal form and from each other, may be, to a certain extent, useful, not only etymologically but by the mere accumulation of materials, as we see in the case of Dr. Richardson's English Dictionary: but it is really shirking the principal intellectual difficulty of a lexicographer's task, and omitting what constitutes the principal utility of a lexicon to nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand of those who have occasion to consult it; leaving them, in truth, to do for themselves what it was the author's business to do for them; to pick up, as they best may, what the lexicographer should have presented ready to their hands.

In manfully encountering this labour and performing it with a success marvellous in a single individual, Dr. Johnson stands pre-eminent, as far as our own language is concerned; and it will not be by discarding this feature of his great work that a better English Dictionary will ever be produced.

## LETTER XII

LANGUAGE (*in continuation*).

IN writing the preceding Letters on Language, several years ago, I was of course assuming it to be one of the legitimate subjects of Mental Philosophy. Such it has been regarded, as far as I know, by the most eminent philosophers.

I was, therefore, not a little surprised to find the investigation or methodical treatment of it ranked amongst the Physical Sciences, in a work of merit which has recently excited a good deal of attention.\*

I had always been accustomed to consider the most general division of the Sciences, founded on the subject-matter, to be into two great classes, the Physical and the Mental.

When the subject investigated is matter and its properties, the science is regarded by most people as a physical science; when the subject is the mind and its operations, as a mental science. In the latter case the majority of philosophers would perhaps designate it a moral one.

It is obvious that the character of the subject

\* Lectures on the Science of Language by Max Müller.

must determine to which of these classes any science can be properly referred.

A few considerations may suffice to show that on this principle the methodical treatment of Language can be no other than a branch of Mental Philosophy, or, if the expression is preferred, Mental Science.

The investigation of the sounds issuing from the organs of speech, and of the structure and the sonorous functions of those organs, doubtless belongs to acoustics and physiology, and so comes under the denomination of physical; but the indication of our thoughts and feelings by such articulate expression is in every case a mental act, which, although it causes a series of physical motions in the body and the atmosphere, does not on that account lose its psychical character. Both the original cause of this mixed train of events and the ultimate effect on the hearer, are affections of the mind; and the material nature of the intermediate movements can be no ground, and has never probably been alleged as a ground, for treating the whole process as belonging to the domain of physical science. The origin and the result are alike of a mental character, and clearly determine the place of language as a subject of methodical investigation.

It will be at once seen by all who enter into the preceding argument, that the propriety of the classification therein maintained does not depend



in the least on the answer to the inquiry how language first arose, or how it attained to its present exuberance; its origin and its growth are in this question alike immaterial considerations. If we suppose it to have been originally given by inspiration or supernatural instruction, that circumstance could not, any more than the nature of its subsequent changes, enter at all into the determination of its character now. It is what it is; and we have to gather from its actual efficiency the functions it performs and thence to refer it to the class of subjects to which it belongs.

Now if you will just cast a backward glance on the five preceding letters and on some other discussions, in the two former Series of these Letters, relating to words, you will observe that they are occupied with such questions as these: whether we can think or reason without language? what passes in the mind on the use of proper and common names and abstract terms? what is the specific intellectual function of words taken singly? how far it is connected with the emotions? and what modification takes place in the mental effects of words when they are combined in sentences? what is the true definition of meaning itself? and as that word denotes an intellectual affection, whether there can be such a thing as an intrinsic meaning? how is it that certain terms produce different mental effects by their position? and other analogous inquiries.

Surely if there is a science of language, all such

questions not only belong to it but form a main part of it, and are quite sufficient to rescue it from being classed with the physical sciences, or rather are utterly inconsistent with such a classification.

The considerations here brought into view do not appear to have duly engaged the attention of Mr. Müller, who, although expressly adverting to some of them,\* decides the question on other grounds, and in so doing narrows the range of the science which he had half acknowledged to extend over the field I have assigned to it.

His lectures are in the main a dissertation on only one part of the subject, namely the formation and genealogy of language and languages; and it is on this limited view that he determines the place of the entire department of knowledge among the sciences. Whilst I, with most others (I imagine) maintain that the classification should be decided by the nature of the functions which language performs, he contends that it is to be decided by its birth or origin, and by its growth or development. Language, he asserts, is a subject of physical science (1) because it is originally the work of God or nature, and (2) because its subsequent growth and changes are governed by laws which mankind obey without being conscious of

\* "Many of these problems," he says in one place, "which have agitated the world from the earliest to our own times, belong properly to the science of language;" and he afterwards mentions as an example of them the controversy about Nominalism and Realism.—*Lectures*, pp. 11, 12.

them, and without intending the general results produced.

In order to make the point at issue clear to those who have not heretofore attended to the subject, it may be needful to state that the researches of philologists have led them generally to the conclusion that what are called the Indo-European or Aryan languages "together point to an earlier period of language when the first ancestors of the Indians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Slaves, the Celts and the Germans were living together within the same inclosures."\* The language they primitively spoke was monosyllabic, consisting of roots about five hundred in number. Up to this point the philologists advance by resolving words made up of more than one syllable or composite terms into their elementary parts, and by comparing various languages as to both verbal and grammatical forms. The species of evidence on which they proceed being thus essentially the decomposition of compound words and the comparison of varying forms, necessarily vanishes when nothing remains but primitive roots. So far their conclusions may be accepted; or, at all events, they cannot be effectively called in question, except by a critic possessing equal erudition to that of the eminent philologists with whom they have originated, or by whom they have been supported.

\* Lectures, p. 213.

Here, however, etymological evidence ends. It lands us in a primitive language of five hundred roots and there it leaves us: it cannot take us a step farther. This is its utmost achievement.

Mr. Müller, nevertheless, is not content to stop here. He attempts to account for the origin of the roots themselves. He concurs with several preceding philologists of eminence in ascribing their production to a creative faculty which man possessed at that period, but which was speedily lost.\* This creative faculty "gave to each conception, as it thrilled for the first time through the brain, a phonetic expression," and "became extinct when its object was fulfilled."†

Never surely was a philosophical hypothesis propounded by an accomplished scholar so completely destitute of evidence to support it. The whole is a series of gratuitous assertions: the creative faculty is purely conjectural; a conception thrilling through the brain is not only merely hypothetical, but, in any case, must be incognoscible or beyond knowledge; and, lastly, the creative faculty giving phonetic expression to the conceptions is the assumed action of an imaginary power.

Admitting that philologists have traced the

\* The same hypothesis, or a similar one, is to be met with in the speculations of F. Schlegel, Wm. Von Humboldt, Dr. Prichard, and other philologists.

† Lectures, by Max Müller, p. 392.

Aryan languages to a monosyllabic state\* and to a few roots, it seems to me obvious, for the reasons already assigned, that when they attempt to account for the origin of these roots, they are proceeding without the least shadow of evidence, trying to wing their way in a vacuum.

But that which directly concerns my subject is the consideration, that supposing the hypothesis to be well-founded, it could afford no ground for designating the science of language a physical science; the creative faculty postulated by it would belong, while it lasted, to the mind of man; the conceptions would of course be mental, and the results effected or contemplated would be intellectual or emotional or both. What would there be in all this to constitute language a physical phenomenon or an appropriate subject of physical science? Or how could it, even in its bare radical stage, be called the production of nature more than anything else proceeding from the human mind? Doubtless, the assumed faculty described as so efficient and so fleeting, would itself be the work of nature; but this would be of little avail to the doctrine: for, first, the circumstance of its being a temporary and transient endowment would not make it more the work of nature than the per-

\* Dr. Latham remarks, in his *Elements of Comparative Philology*, that the doctrine which affirms all roots to have been originally monosyllabic can scarcely be taken absolutely. See page 699.

manent parts of the human constitution: and, secondly, although the human faculties may be characterised as the work of nature, yet what proceeds from them cannot; otherwise Art itself would come under the same denomination.\* With no propriety can the smith who makes the sickle for the labourer of the field, be called the reaper of the harvest. It is precisely because an effect is accomplished through the mind of man that it is *not* attributed to nature.†

Let us next examine whether the growth and changes of language, or their causes, can be considered as taking it into the domain of physical science on the ground that in effecting them man obeys laws of which he is unconscious, and promotes, without intending it, the results which ensue. Such, I apprehend, is the drift of the following passages:

“Let us consider first,” he says, “that although there is a continual change in language, it is not in the power of man either to produce or to prevent it. We might think as well of changing the laws

\* Vide Note C.

† This truth is well insisted upon by St. Gregory in a passage quoted by the Lecturer himself: “Though God has given to human nature its faculties, it does not follow that therefore He produces all the actions which we perform. He has given us the faculty of building a house and doing any other work, but we surely are the builders and not He. In the same manner our faculty of speaking is the work of Him who has so framed our nature, but the invention of words for the naming of each object is the work of the mind.”—*Lectures*, p. 30.

which control the circulation of our blood, or of adding an inch to our height, as of altering the laws of speech, or inventing new words according to our own pleasure.”\*

Again, speaking of the individual: “He can do nothing by himself, and the first impulse to a new formation in language, though given by an individual, is mostly, if not always, given without premeditation, nay, unconsciously. The individual as such is powerless, and the results apparently produced by him depend on laws beyond his control, and on the cooperation of all those who form together with him one class, one body, or one organic whole.”†

Further on in reference to the laws of what he styles phonetic decay, he says, “these laws were not made by man: on the contrary, man had to obey them without knowing of their existence.”‡

Hence the author infers, if I understand him aright, that language belongs to the domain of physical science. It does not belong to the other great department of science (which for the present I will designate the non-physical) because it is not the product of individuals consciously and intentionally engaged in forming or altering it, but of a number of men constituting one body or one organic whole. The argument seems to me to comprise implicitly two separate allegations which are not perhaps

\* Lectures, p. 37.

† Ibid. p. 40.

‡ Ibid. p. 64.

kept sufficiently distinct and which are both erroneous: (1) that when we are unconscious of the principles which guide our acts, those acts are not mental but physical; (2) that when the concurrent acts of individuals resulting in some general effect, are not purposely done with a view to that effect, not only the individual so acting has no share in producing it, and is to be regarded as powerless, but the act is to be ranked amongst physical events.

1. The first of these positions is confuted by a great number of mental phenomena: it will be sufficient to name the association of ideas,\* and the

\* "Courteous readers" will excuse the introduction of a passage in relation to this point taken from a work by the present author which from the small number of copies printed, they are not likely to have seen: "Our thoughts are suggested, combined, associated, and uttered, without any advertence to, nay without any knowledge of, the principles on which these incidents depend, unless we purposely make them objects of attention. A hypothetical example will elucidate this. Our convenient friend A (by supposition) meets with a certain person in the street; that person, by having on some peculiar article of dress, brings to his mind a scene in Wales, where he first saw it worn; hence follows the recollection of the Welsh mountains; thereupon certain geological phenomena are immediately suggested; these take him to pre-historic periods—to the igneous rocks, to the earliest traces of vegetable and animal life; to the first appearance of mankind on the mutable crust of our diversified sphere; and so his ideas run on till he is landed, perhaps, in the 'Vestiges of Creation,' or in Mr. Darwin's 'Origin of Species.' Through this long train of conceptions, you may trace that some were suggested by proximity, some by resemblance, some by causation: but whatever



process of reasoning. To take the latter: Every man reasons as every man talks; he does it incessantly; he cannot avoid it; but he is not conscious of the principles on which he proceeds, nor even, for the most part, of the nature of the process in which he is engaged. We do not, however, say on this account that particular acts of reasoning are not his own and are not mental events; and in like manner we cannot say that the changes in language are not to be attributed to man as the work of his own mind, on the ground that he is not distinctly conscious of the principles of his nature which influence him to make them.

2. The second position is equally groundless. A hundred instances might be adduced in which individuals without intending it, concur in producing a joint result of which their volitional agency is alone the proximate cause. A farmer, for example, for some purpose of his own brings his stock of wheat to market; a thousand other farmers in various parts of the country happen to

were the relations that brought them into his mind, our friend A was (a thousand to one) utterly unconscious that any such governed his thoughts, or were circumstances on which the intellectual procession depended."—*On the Received Text of Shakespeare's Dramatic Writings and its Improvement*, p. 234 (1862). As the author is now addressing those who are interested in philosophy, he may venture to add that the work just cited is, to some extent, an application of psychological principles to the emendation of corrupt passages in those immortal dramas.

do the same about the same time ; and the result of so many contemporaneous sales is a fall in the price : but not one of these farmers has probably the slightest intention of producing such a decline. His aim must be on the contrary to sell his produce at the highest price he can get. Of course if he were foolish enough to entertain the design of depressing the general market by his individual act, he could not succeed ; which is only affirming the truism that an individual cannot himself effect what in the nature of the case must be the result of the joint acts of many : but without any design on his part, what he does is, nevertheless, efficient towards the issue, and consequently he cannot be considered as not concerned in producing it by volition although not by intention. The whole of the individuals produce the whole of the effect through their voluntary acts. So in language, a change cannot establish itself except by the concurrent volitions of a number of unconnected persons acting for the most part without a view to the general result ; but still it is properly regarded as the work of the human mind : there is no other agent to do it, and above all it must ever stand apart from physical phenomena.

From the considerations here adduced the general conclusion may be briefly stated to be, that although the changes in language may take place according to laws in the human constitution of which the men who make the changes are not cognisant, and may

be effected by the concurrent acts of numerous individuals, without any view on their part to the general result, they are still accomplished through the human mind, and the investigation of them belongs to mental science.

The preceding observations notice the substance of the principal arguments and allegations of the Lecturer intended to show the science of language to be one of the physical sciences: and if my refutation of his doctrine is valid, it is scarcely requisite (except for the sake of obviating objections founded on the omission of what some may consider to be important) to advert to the singular positions on the subjects of history and growth which he has laid down in support of it.

On these subjects, notwithstanding his general perspicuity and mastery of the English tongue, he appears to me to have fallen into such indefiniteness and confusion as can scarcely fail to perplex any students who wish to thoroughly comprehend his treatise. His aim, as far as it is to be gathered from an exposition marked by such qualities, seems to be to show that *history* and *growth* are to be contra-distinguished and are in some way incompatible, and that as language *grows* and consequently has no history, it comes within the domain of the physical sciences. Now, that history and growth are different every one must admit; they are so different, indeed, as to be what is logically termed disparate; and hence although

they may be distinguished, they cannot with propriety or for any useful purpose, be *contra*-distinguished or drawn into comparison or contrast.

To elucidate this, let us take the title of his second Lecture, which runs: "The growth of language in *contra*-distinction to the history of language."

Here two things are placed in opposition which are really not opposed to each other.

By *history* we mean a narrative of successive events; by *growth* the increase of some body, or substance, or appearance, or other entity; and as the latter consists or may consist of successive increments, those increments may be observed and recorded, and thus growth may become the subject of history. Hence to *contra*-distinguish these two things is to make an unmeaning or a false antithesis.

In another passage the Lecturer not only makes the same false antithesis between history and growth, but he combines a second with it: he contrasts certain departments of knowledge not with another department, but with *the subject* of another department. "Art, Science, Philosophy and Religion," he says, "all have a history; language or any other production of nature, admits only of growth."

Here Science, and of course any science,—the science of the stars for example, — is brought into comparison not with the *science* of language but with the *subject-matter* of that science, with

language itself, and hence it is no wonder that the proposition turns out to be nugatory.

If this defect were remedied by saying, "the stars have a history, language has only growth;" or, "the science of the stars has a history, the science of language has only growth;" in either case a proposition would be obtained not certainly destitute of a precise signification but clearly untenable, for, contrary to what the first asserts, language has a history; and, contrary to what the second asserts, the science of language has a history.

As the passage stands in the Lectures, it not only embodies both the defects pointed out, but presents us with a proposition altogether purposeless. It is impossible to draw from it any conclusion; and if impossibility admitted of degrees, it would be especially impossible to draw from it the conclusion deduced by the Lecturer, that language belongs to the domain of physical not of historical science.

The inference itself, however obtained, does not call for discussion here, since I have already shown that the nature of those changes in language which he sums up in the term growth, constitutes no ground for classing the investigation of that interesting train of human events with the physical sciences.

With regard to the term historical, nevertheless, as here and elsewhere applied to the whole class of the sciences which are not physical, it may be

necessary to say something in addition. The epithet so applied is objectionable in itself, and inconsistent not only with the acceptation required in other parts of the Lectures, but with the necessities of English speech. It seems needless to use it at all in the designation or classification of the sciences, but if it be admitted it should be employed in consonance with its customary applications.

Properly speaking, an historical science is one that investigates the principles on which a series of connected or kindred events, whether physical or moral, have taken place, and would again take place, were the same circumstances to be repeated.

Such a series of events may either have been expressly recorded, in which case they would clearly belong to history; or have left their traces behind them without any human testimony to vouch for what had occurred, and in this case their scientific position might be questioned, and the application of the term not so clear. But if from such traces we could deduce a connected succession of occurrences, they would properly come, it seems to me, within the same province.

On this ground Geology might be appropriately denominated historical, although there is no direct testimony to the great bulk of the events with which it deals, and which are, indeed, usually styled in the narrow sense of the word pre-historic. They must have happened at any rate in regular

sequence and through successive periods, and are thus essentially historical in character. They belong to what Dr. Latham, in the treatise cited below, terms Pre-historic History.

For similar reasons, comparative philology (or whatever else we may term this department of knowledge) might be designated as historical.

It is almost altogether occupied in tracing the connexion of successive events, namely, the changes in language; which are to be gathered, indeed, from human writings, but not for the most part from direct and positive testimony. They have perhaps in one point a better claim to the title in question than geological mutations, inasmuch as they are to a far less extent pre-historic in the sense before cited.\*

But geology may not only be regarded in a certain sense as historical in character but be correctly styled a science, since it investigates the causes of the phenomena which it describes, as well as traces the succession or order, or contemporaneousness of their occurrence.

Comparative philology, on the other hand, although in the same sense historical in its cha-

\* I should have liked to cite here Dr. Latham's opinions on some of these points in his recent work on Comparative Philology, but that it would not be easy to give them in other words than his own, and to quote the passages I allude to *verbatim* would occupy too much space. I must therefore refer the reader to the book itself. See p. 747 et seq.

racter, is scarcely in its present state to be called scientific, because while it traces the order and the manner in which the changes in language happen, it bestows little attention on the causes producing them.

These causes can be nothing proximately but states or movements of the human mind. They are occasionally adverted to in the work before me, but I seem to myself to miss in these Lectures, as well as in the writings of other philologists, a systematic explanation of them.

There are great learning and ingenuity displayed by the authors in tracing the ancestry of a word, and even its country cousins as well as its remoter relatives and foreign kindred; and in showing how words have been gradually modified into more or less resembling and even occasionally very dissimilar vocables; how likewise certain stages in language have succeeded each other, and the particular stages in which the languages of the world now severally are.

But we are not told, except occasionally and incidentally, on what principles or from what causes these changes took place, or, in more explicit terms, we are not told what motives or views or purposes influenced men to make them.

No doubt to assign these causes would be a work of great labour, thought, and difficulty, and frequently not to be accomplished even by the most strenuous efforts: but until some systematic



attempt to do it has been made, comparative philology may be very valuable and very admirable in its way, but can scarcely be regarded as scientific. If it is to be distinguished by the appellation of a science at all, it can be termed only a phenomenal science. In its actual condition it appears to me to be something like a branch of natural history disconnected from physiology; or like Geology, were that science a mere account of the changes successively produced on the crust of the globe and of the order of their occurrence, without any reference to their causes; or, in other words, without recourse to Natural Philosophy, Botany, Zoology, Chemistry and the rest, to explain them.

I may perhaps make my views on this subject more readily and fully understood if I cite some instances in which what I here suggest (for it is nothing new) has been done.

The first writer I will quote in exemplification is Horne Tooke, who, although like most of his fellow-labourers in philology, exceedingly sparing of observations on this point, yet almost at the outset of his book insists on one great mental principle operating to produce changes in language, namely, the desire for despatch. "The first aim of language," he says, "was to communicate our thoughts; the second, to do it with despatch."\* The latter purpose, he affirms, "has had a much

\* Divisions of Purley, Vol. I. p 27.

greater share in accounting for the different sorts of words than the former." He afterwards recognizes that alterations and additions may have been made "for the sake of beauty, ornament, ease, gracefulness or pleasure" — points nevertheless which he does not undertake to discuss.<sup>†</sup>

Mr. Müller scarcely bestows more attention on this aspect of the matter than Tooke. He only occasionally assigns the principles on which changes are effected: once at least he does it explicitly, and several times, implicitly. For example, he permits us to catch sight of such a principle, when he tells us that the sense of grammatical justice, the generous feeling of what ought to be, has eliminated many so called irregular forms.\* And in the same page, he traces the change from the Latin *illius* to *de illo*, to the *inconvenience* people felt.

More frequently, however, while doubtless aware of the real facts implied, he personifies language (as we are all apt to do), speaks of it as an agent or power, and attributes the changes which it undergoes to itself. Thus he says: "We may well understand that a root having the general meaning of mingling or being together, should be employed to express both the friendly joining of hands and the engaging in hostile combat; but we may equally understand that language in *its*

\* Lectures, p. 66.

progress to clearness and definiteness, should have desired a distinction between these two meanings, and should gladly have availed *herself* [*sic*] of the two derivatives, *yuj* and *yudh*, to mark this distinction." \*

This can be interpreted to mean only that the men who spoke the language entertained the desire and gladly marked the distinction, † so that we have here the implicit recognition of another mental principle effecting verbal changes, the desire to mark differences of meaning couched under one word by some modification of that word — the desire, in fact, for definite and distinct expression.

These passages and a few others of similar tendency are slight indications, at the best, of the principles at work in the human mind when directed upon language, but they point to an important path of inquiry.

I will add that Mr. Garnett, in his able Essays, also gives a few similar indications.

He remarks that "in the Indian languages

\* Lectures, p. 269.

† Mr. Müller excellently observes in an early lecture, "To speak of language as a thing by itself, as living a life of its own, as growing to maturity, producing offspring and dying away, is sheer mythology: and though we cannot help using metaphorical expressions, we should always be on our guard, when engaged in inquiries like the present, against being carried away by the very words which we are using."—Ibid. p. 41.

(American) there is an evident *anxiety* to leave nothing implied that can be expressed"—almost the opposite to the desire for brevity and despatch insisted upon by Horne Tooke.

Another principle to which Mr. Garnett attributes great effects is the taste or craving for agreeable sounds. "In some of the leading tongues, more particularly in Sanskrit and Greek, a vast number of articulations have been sacrificed to considerations of euphony."\* In a former Essay he had mentioned that "in Sanskrit, *finals* are changed exclusively for the sake of euphony"†—in itself a notable fact for my present purpose.

Collecting into one view these scattered and incidental notices, we obtain a small body of mental principles, to each of which, casually introduced as they are, important effects on language are ascribed, not, let it be observed, by myself, but by the writers who furnish them.

Thus a *preponderant share* in originating the different sorts of words, is attributed to the desire for dispatch; the sense of grammatical justice has (it is affirmed) eliminated *many* irregular forms; certain changes which from their nature must be numerous, are referred to a desire for definite and distinct expression; in a large family of languages there is manifested, we are told, a desire to express *everything* with fullness; in Greek and Sanskrit a

\* Philological Essays, p. 325.

† Ibid. p. 81.

*vast number* of articulations, it is stated, have been sacrificed to a taste for euphony; and in the latter language, finals are said to be changed *exclusively* from the same principle.

These specimens, while they proclaim the importance, and the extensiveness of the field open to inquiry, are enough to indicate what might be accomplished by a systematic attention to a part or aspect of the subject, which seems hitherto to have attracted only casual notice.

## LETTER XIII.

## MORAL SENTIMENTS.

It has been one part of my plan in the foregoing discussions, to take hackneyed and yet unsettled questions, as far as possible, out of the language in which they have been unsuccessfully mooted, and put them into other and simpler forms. Thus, instead of concerning myself with human powers and faculties, which are fictitious entities or mere personifications that have too often engrossed and misled philosophers, I have treated directly of mental operations and affections, which are real events not to be questioned by any one without transparent inconsistency.

In pursuing the investigation of moral science, I purpose to adopt the same method by avoiding those venerated personifications "the moral sense," "the conscience," and "the heart;" all very convenient and unexceptionable phrases in ordinary speech or rhetorical discourse, and dear to the lovers of vague and indefinite speculation, but not easily reconcilable with close and consecutive thinking; and which I shall attempt to show, before I conclude, are superfluous and even detrimental forms of expression in philosophical

inquiries. Instead of such fictitious entities, I shall speak of the feelings, thoughts, and actions of mankind which we all recognize as real things.

The field of morality is human conduct, and our moral sentiments being the feelings with which that conduct inspires us, my present purpose is to trace their rudiments, follow their development, and ascertain their nature.

The facts in the human constitution in which moral phenomena originate, or on which they depend, mainly at least, are the following :

1. Man is susceptible of pleasure and pain of various kinds and of various degrees.
2. He likes and dislikes respectively the causes of them.
3. He resents (in the widest sense of the term) or desires to reciprocate the pleasure and the pain received, when they are intentionally given by other sentient beings.
4. He expects them to be reciprocated when he has himself given them to his fellow-men; coveting the reciprocation in the one case and shunning it in the other.
5. He not only is susceptible of pleasure and pain given directly to himself, but he feels under certain circumstances more or less sympathy with the pleasures and pains given to others, accompanied by a proportionate desire that those affections should be reciprocated to the givers.

It would be mere supererogation to attempt to prove a statement of this kind, since every man can readily verify the facts for himself from consciousness and personal experience amongst his fellows.

Concurrently with the feelings here described, there are certain intellectual operations going on within him, which although they may be intimately blended or take place simultaneously with the emotions, it is yet useful to discriminate. When he experiences pleasure or pain, he frequently perceives the agent in the act of producing it; which is intellectual discernment: and he likewise infers that it has been given intentionally; which is reasoning. When, in consequence, he likes or dislikes the agent, the pleasure or the pain is connected with the latter in his thoughts; which is memory and what is usually called association of ideas.

When, moreover, he looks forward to a reciprocation of the pleasure and the pain which he has himself caused to his fellow-beings, he both recollects and reasons as well as hopes and fears. In fact it is impossible, as a moment's reflection will show, for moral sentiments to exist without the accompaniment of intellectual conditions and processes.

These rudimentary affections, states, and operations of consciousness, are found more or less developed or manifested in all, or nearly all, the



human race; and from them may be traced the rise and formation of moral sentiment in all its various phases.

It may appear a superfluous limitation to say "nearly all the human race," but tribes have been found with some of these mental principles so obscurely, or rather so dubiously and uncertainly manifested, as to make it questionable whether we can be said to have sufficient evidence that they possess even the rudiments of such principles. Amongst the feelings of which sometimes no certain indication can be discovered, may be particularized the desire to reciprocate kindness or benefits, and also the emotion of sympathy or fellow-feeling with the enjoyments and sufferings of others.

In the natives of the Andaman Islands,\* and in certain tribes inhabiting the Philippine Islands, according to accounts recently brought before the public, the indications of several of these rudiments are non-apparent. In reference to some of the Indians of the latter region, one of the friars once resident there said, "Did all mankind hang on a single peg and that peg were wanted by an Indian for his hat, he would sacrifice all mankind:" † a statement which if it could be taken as un-

\* An account of these people was given by Professor Owen to the British Association at Manchester, Sept. 1861.

† 'A Visit to the Philippine Islands,' by Sir J. Bowring, p. 138.

exaggerated would strip the subjects of it of all pretension to fellow-feeling.

Another statement has the same tendency :

“I had once occasion,” says the author from whose book I have taken the above, “to examine in the prison of Kandy (Ceylon) one of the real ‘wild men of the woods,’ of that island, who had been convicted of murder; the moral sense was so unawakened, that it was obvious no idea of wrong was associated with the act, and the judge most properly did not consider him a responsible being on whom he could inflict the penalties of the law.”\* This, as I understand it, is intended as a representation not merely of an individual but of the race.

Such cases of moral deficiency in tribes and nations, however, even if unquestionably established, may for my present purpose be left out of consideration, and cannot disturb the course of my argument. My disquisition may without detriment and without any impeachment of its general applicability, be regarded as not embracing them if they exist, and may accordingly be designated as an endeavour to trace the nature and development of moral sentiment in those human beings who possess the rudimentary powers and susceptibilities described.

In attempting to do this it will be necessary for

\* ‘A Visit to the Philippine Islands,’ by Sir J. Bowring, p. 167.

me to draw some distinctions not always sufficiently adverted to, premising that although the objects by which the susceptibilities are affected can be no other than human beings acting in particular ways, yet it will be convenient, for the sake of brevity, as is usually done, to speak of the actions themselves in the character of the objects, instead of the human beings acting. Adopting this convenient and even unavoidable mode of speech (not however without occasional recourse to the fuller expression and a constant tacit reference to the whole meaning implied) I shall proceed, in the next letter, to point out the distinctions to which I have referred.

## LETTER XIV.

MORAL SENTIMENTS (*in continuation*).

HAVING laid down the principles of our nature which I conceive to form the basis of all moral sentiment, I purpose in the present letter to examine and describe more particularly how these rudimentary affections unfold themselves.

Actions giving pleasure or pain and intentionally done with a view to produce those effects, may be conveniently ranked for the purposes of investigation and exposition under the following predicaments:

1. Actions done to ourselves by others.
2. Actions done to others by others.
3. Actions done to others by ourselves.

In each of these cases our feelings are so unavoidably modified in regard to the same or similar actions, that it will be needful to examine them separately. If an action is done to ourselves, we feel in one way; if it is done not to us but within our cognizance by A to B, we feel in another way, or in the same way but in a different degree; if we ourselves do it to another person, we feel in a still different way or in a still different degree.

To make these distinctions, which I shall hereafter more fully enter into, perfectly clear at the outset, let us suppose a man half starved and voraciously hungry to have at length obtained a supply of food, which he is just on the point of devouring when another man, for the gratification of his own appetite, snatches it from him and carries it off; and let us further suppose that we, without being able to prevent it, are spectators of the iniquitous spoliation.

The man who is robbed of what he prizes at the moment beyond all things, will be seized with violent indignation and deadly desire of vengeance: the robber, as soon as the engrossment of his whole being in the satisfaction of his appetite has subsided, will feel more or less uneasiness and dread of the vengeance he has provoked; while we the spectators shall sympathise with the injured starveling and be filled with indignant reprobation of the wrong committed:—a reprobation, nevertheless, tame in comparison with the passionate exasperation of him who has suffered the injury.

This hypothetical instance will be sufficient to show the necessity of considering our different feelings with regard to actions generically the same, when such actions come under the several predicaments already enumerated: in other words, the different sentiments occasioned in us by similar actions, according as we are the subjects, the spectators, or the doers of them.

1. We will first inquire, then, into the nature of our feelings in regard to actions done to ourselves by others.

It is these feelings which lie at the foundation of the rest, and they are therefore to be carefully examined and discriminated.

When we are placed amongst our fellow-creatures in almost any situation, they intentionally contribute, or may contribute, in many ways to our pleasure. One offers us shelter or refreshment; another brings us an agreeable object to look at; a third guides us on our way; a fourth relieves us from some annoyance. In these simple cases we feel pleasure at the thing done; we feel a liking for the person intentionally conferring the pleasure, i.e. we feel his presence or even the thought of him to be agreeable; and we feel an inclination to give pleasure in return. These two last feelings—liking the cause and inclination to reciprocate the pleasure, constitute what we mean by moral approbation, or, I may say, constitute the simplest form of that state of mind which is termed moral approbation. Even if no other considerations occurred to us we should have the feelings described.

The contrary case it is scarcely necessary to do more than indicate. Our fellow-creatures are able not only to confer pleasure upon us but to inflict pain. One deprives us of property, another fetters our movements, another wounds us in some part of the body. Here we not only suffer the pain,

but feel dislike of the individuals who intentionally inflict it, and a desire to make them proportionately suffer in return.

These feelings of dislike and resentment constitute the simplest form of moral disapprobation.

In order to have the sentiments here described, it is not essentially necessary that we should in every case directly know that the action was done by the person to whom we attribute it, and that it was beneficial or injurious to us: it is sufficient if we conceive or infer these several particulars. Even an unaccountable caprice of fancy or a misapprehension of what is seen, may excite our liking or aversion towards an action with the consequent desire to reciprocate the pleasure or displeasure received, when there is no actual foundation for either the one cast of sentiment or the other. Misconception is sometimes as strong a ground of approbation or disapprobation as fact itself.

For the purpose of exhibiting the feelings or sentiments of approbation and disapprobation in their pristine or rudimentary form, it will be well to put an imaginary case. If all the actions of those of our fellow-creatures with whom we lived, were of a kind that affected only ourselves and did not affect any body else; if the acts of A affected us but did not affect B, and the acts of B affected us but did not affect A, we should manifestly still feel approbation and disapprobation of them according to their quality. Or to state the illustration

differently, if we lived with only one fellow-creature A, and had no intercourse of any kind with other human beings, we should still feel the sentiments in question; they would not fail to be excited by the conduct of even one individual towards us; so that they would be direct effects of actions done to ourselves. They would be moral sentiments in what may be called their purely selfish form.

If we advert for a moment to the feelings engendered in our minds by material objects, it may throw light on the subject before us, and especially enable us to distinguish mere liking and disliking from the combination of those feelings with the desire to reciprocate good and evil which constitutes moral sentiment. Certain inanimate objects give pleasure through our organs of sense; others give pain. The rose pleases us by its colour and its fragrance, and we not only see it with gratification, but when we merely think of it, we have a similar although fainter emotion: we like it. The nettle, on the contrary, stings and is avoided. It becomes a disagreeable object to handle either actually or in imagination.

If we attend to our feelings on such occasions, we shall find, (1) An organic pleasure or pain; (2) A liking or disliking of the object when it is presented to us either actually or merely in idea.

The same feelings are engendered in our minds by the lower animals with whom we come in contact. They exhibit in their actions certain qualities



which please us, and other qualities which displease us, and we may trace in ourselves, (1) The primary pleasure or pain; (2) The consequent liking or disliking, just as in the case of objects without life.

But, in addition to these, we feel also an instinctive desire to reciprocate the pleasure or the pain arising from such qualities, similar to that which we experience towards human beings, and which is not (except perhaps by children or savages, or for a bare moment) usually felt towards inanimate objects.

In the latter case kindness or resentment is instantly checked if not prevented, by its manifest inutility and inappropriateness—by its being obviously misplaced—while in the case of animated beings, there is no such perception of inutility or misapplication, but on the contrary, an instinctive or quickly following apprehension that to manifest those sentiments by some outward act, will tend to encourage or deter.

Thus if a human being were solitary in the world, destitute of the society of any of his fellow-creatures, a Robinson Crusoe from his very infancy, he would still have a system of feelings engendered or rather developed in his mind, of what even then might be called a moral character. He would like and dislike material objects; he would more strongly like and dislike the inferior animals, and towards the latter he would feel a disposition to reciprocate

pleasure and pain, which is the peculiar distinction of moral sentiment.

We thus clearly see that sensibility to pleasure and pain, the consequent liking and disliking felt towards the agent concerned in giving them, and the desire of reciprocation when they are intentionally given to ourselves, are respectively essential to moral approbation and disapprobation in their simplest forms.

There are two objections which may possibly be taken to styling these sentiments when directed upon actions done to ourselves, moral approbation and disapprobation: first, it may be alleged that the affections in question are frequently too violent to be characterised by so temperate a designation; and secondly, it may be contended that as they originate in purely personal feeling and are (by supposition) destitute of sympathy, the epithet *moral* is scarcely appropriate to them.

Undoubtedly when, as the first objection supposes, they become intense, when they rise into passions, we usually call them gratitude and resentment, or eagerness to return benefits and desire of revenge, reserving the former denominations, if we employ them at all in the case, for the cooler feelings which in point of warmth do not exceed such as we generally have when we are spectators and actors, not immediate subjects or sufferers. Unquestionably too there is some foundation (chiefly

from the ambiguity of terms) for the second objection.

(1) As to the first exception here taken, it must be considered that the sentiments we experience in respect to any given action, whether we suffer it, witness it, or do it ourselves, are all liable, although not equally so, to be intensified, while they are in certain respects so similar, so allied in origin and effects and become so blended and mutually influenced, that it is exceedingly convenient if not unavoidable to speak of them under one general designation, notwithstanding that they may occasionally be carried to such extremes as demand peculiar appellations.

Such peculiar appellations may be very properly employed to designate the higher and more marked degrees of the affections in question, but if you attempt to draw a strict line of application between them and the lower degrees, you find as you descend in the scale that it is impossible to do it.

(2) In answer to the second objection, it is sufficient to allege that the term *moral* carries with it an ambiguity seldom avoided by even our most precise writers, and exemplified by the objection under notice. It is, in general, used more or less designedly in antithesis to *immoral*, and hence is eulogistic; but in philosophy strictly it is neutral, and means relating to conduct whatever that conduct may be; whence we speak of moral offences and moral depravity as well as (in the same neutral

sense) of moral speculations and moral excellence. Hence selfish approbation and disapprobation may, equally with disinterested or sympathetic, be correctly spoken of as moral sentiments.

It is in savage and uncultivated life that the violent desire for reciprocation is seen in its extreme degree; but the violence usually takes place only when the desire is for the reciprocation of evil.

Amongst barbarians gratitude is commonly weak, while the craving for revenge absorbs the whole nature, and is sometimes perpetuated to the third and fourth generation.

We are told by a recent traveller that an African race, the Namaquas, are unable to appreciate kindness, and seem to have no word in their language expressive of gratitude.\*

With regard to the other passion, another traveller states that in Australia "the holiest duty a native is called on to perform, is that of avenging the death of his nearest relation."†

Both passions, however, are sometimes exhibited with extraordinary intensity in the same race. Speaking of the American tribes about Lake Superior, Kohl tells us that the blood of even the youngest Indian children appears to be impregnated with revenge. If, nevertheless, you have once done a service to one of these savages,

\* Lake Ngami, by C. J. Anderson, 2nd Ed. p. 28.

† Journals in Australia, by George Grey, Vol. II. p. 240.

he will bountifully repay you whenever he has it in his power.\*

2. Having taken a brief survey of actions done to ourselves, and our consequent feelings, let us next consider our sentiments towards actions under the second predicament (namely, actions done to others by others) when such actions are within our cognizance: a class necessarily more comprehensive than either the preceding or the subsequent one. Actions under this predicament, however, would obviously have no meaning to us (for the most part at least) unless we had had some experience of actions more or less analogous done to ourselves.

When we witness them, we are affected with certain feelings allied to those already described, although not generally speaking in the same degree of intensity as when actions are directed to us personally.

It will assist us to trace the course of these feelings, if we take into view one or two further distinctions in a very complicated set of phenomena where it is impossible to consider all. Actions done to others by others may be,

1. Actions done to those whom we love;
2. Actions done to those who are indifferent to us;
3. Actions done to those whom we hate.

\* Kitchi-gami, or Wanderings round Lake Superior, by J. G. Kohl, pp. 272—77.

And a similar discrimination may be made as to actions done *by* these several parties, but it will suffice for the purpose of exposition to consider the former, viz. actions done *to* the parties standing to us in the respective relations given.

When we witness an action done to one we love, which we should approve if done to ourselves, we naturally regard it with similar complacency; and we feel an analogous desire to make a return of pleasure to the agent. To love a person is to extend our own sensibility to the pains and pleasures of the beloved object. I need not do more than allude to a mother's affection for her child.

The contrary case is equally true. We naturally feel displeased to witness an injury done to any one we like; and we feel resentment against the perpetrator, much in the same way and often in the same degree as when an injury is done to ourselves.

In fine, our sympathy with the pleasures and pains of a beloved object is generally strong, and is sometimes carried to an intensity which transcends that of our own personal enjoyment and suffering. In such cases our gratitude and resentment are of course proportionately excited towards the actor.

Proceeding to the next division of actions done to others by others, we find the result somewhat modified.

When we witness an action done by one man to another, where neither party is particularly inter-

esting to us, where, for example, they are both entire strangers, there is not the same excitation of feeling as in the last case.

But mankind naturally sympathise with each other's pleasures and pains, except (and it is a very large exception) when some cause is at work to counteract or supersede the sympathy ; and apart from this, we naturally, by the law of association, feel some degree of pleasure at witnessing an action which would have pleased us if done to ourselves or to those we love ; and some degree of pain at an action of the contrary tendency. The bare imagination of anything which has caused us pain is disagreeable, although no one really suffers, as in a tale of fiction ; and when we see the pain actually inflicted on a human being, however indifferent to us he may be, we must, in the absence of counteracting causes, be similarly affected.

In a word, as we dislike evil actions done to ourselves, and dislike even to think upon them, we cannot fail (sympathy apart) to dislike them when obtruded on our thoughts by being done to others, nothing (it is assumed) intervening to countervail or subvert the influence of the association : and as sympathy is usually called into play as well as association, the resulting emotion may be and often is strong and lively.

The pleasure and the displeasure we feel on the occasions here described, are also attended by a desire, sometimes faint, sometimes strong, that the

agent shall experience pleasure or pain in return for the good or evil which he may have caused. When we ourselves are personally concerned we have, as already explained, this desire habitually as well as instinctively, and if it did not instinctively spring up in our minds, as it really does, in these other cases, it would cling to us by the force of association.

Nevertheless the sympathy which human beings have with other human beings not personally or specially connected with them, is not found to exist in a high degree except under peculiar circumstances, and frequently disappears altogether. A certain measure of civilisation, or of intellectual culture, or some other special cause, seems required to bring it out. Amongst the rude and uncultivated it is extremely weak, perpetually liable to numerous counteractions, and easily extinguished. We are too apt to ascribe to men universally what belongs only to instructed men, and to them not by any means with the uniformity of a law.

If we look into the accounts we possess of savage or semi-barbarous people, we shall find the utmost indifference to the sufferings of each other where there are no family ties or special connexions to rouse a fellow feeling in the spectator, and not unfrequently even then.

A recent traveller presents us with a remarkable but easily paralleled instance of this utter want of sympathy.



“A large number of artisans (Burmese) were employed in gilding the lofty spire of the pagoda, for the accomplishment of which object they were mounted on a high bamboo ladder, about thirty feet broad, and some hundred and fifty in height, very loosely constructed and not fixed as a scaffolding, the top merely resting on the spire, and the feet on the ground at the base of the building. I should think there were at least a hundred workmen on this ladder at the time, busily engaged in their occupation, apparently confident in the safety of the bamboo upon which they had trusted their persons. It had however been raining a little while previously, and the ground beneath them had become slippery from the wet. Suddenly the feet of the treacherous ladder were seen to recede from their original position, and the destruction of the workmen above appeared imminent. Slowly slid the frail support, and the poor wretches upon it must certainly have felt that they were moving towards their doom. The world was literally slipping from beneath their feet. There were hundreds of their fellow-countrymen below, gazing upon the gradually descending concourse, and awaiting the apparently inevitable result, not in breathless and fearful apprehension, but with every demonstration of intense delight. They laughed, actually laughed uproariously, as the bottom of the ladder neared a declivity still more greasy than the level ground around the pagoda; and not one stirred to arrest

its downward progress, although but a little effort would have prevented what seemed an impending frightful sacrifice of life. Had it not been for a party of artillerymen, who had observed the affair from a distance, and who had providentially arrived at the spot in time to render assistance, every one of those unhappy men upon the ladder must have perished, with their countrymen around them laughing at the fun.”\*

Where there is such indifference as this amongst men to the sufferings of each other, even of those amongst whom they live, moral approbation and disapprobation can scarcely exist except in their selfish or self-interested forms. These people who could laugh at the frightful catastrophe to which their neighbours were hurrying, would probably have resented any inhumanity shown to their own sufferings or any injury inflicted on themselves, or even on the objects of their love; although even this degree of sensibility is in some cases more than can be perceived. “It is said that many a time an Indian has allowed his wife and children to perish in the flames when his house has taken fire, but never was known to fail in securing his favourite *gallo* [game-cock] from danger.”†

The third division of actions under the second

\* Four Years in Burmah, by W. H. Marshall, quoted in the *Athenæum*.

† A Visit to the Philippine Islands, by Sir J. Bowring, p. 8.

predicament, namely actions done to others by others, comprises such as are done by others to persons whom we dislike.

As we already feel a degree of resentment against persons we hate, we naturally feel displeasure when this resentment is contravened by the circumstance of the objects of it being made to rejoice instead of being made to suffer; when, in other words, they receive the benefits of the good actions of their neighbours.

This displeasure, however, is liable to be modified and even overcome by the habitual associations established in our minds with actions of that character.

In the opposite case, when an evil action is done to our enemy, we naturally rejoice, but the joy again is modified by the disagreeable emotions which are associated in our minds with an evil action. We already dislike and condemn it, and although we dislike the sufferer we may dislike the action still more. In savages and uncultivated people this dislike of the mere action is weak or wanting, and their joy at seeing an enemy suffer the acutest torments, justly or unjustly, is intense, and often unqualified. The same casting away of humanity occurs amongst nations who have reached the highest point of civilisation yet attained, when they are at war with each other. Then deceit, lying, robbing, murdering, are all not only committed without compunction but witnessed without

condemnation, nay even with universal applause. It is needless to discuss the real height reached by that civilisation with which such things are compatible.

3. Having considered in the first place actions done by others to ourselves, and secondly actions done by others to others, I now come to those which fall under the third predicament, namely, actions done by ourselves to others.

An important observation presents itself at the outset. Whatever feelings we have in regard to actions under the two first predicaments, will be naturally awakened by analogous actions which come under the last. When we intentionally do an act to another person which gives him pleasure, we enjoy in some degree the gratification naturally attached to an act of beneficence in the other two cases. We have commonly a lively impression of its effect on him from recollecting the emotion produced by similar acts done to ourselves, and also done to others by others.

But while we are thus naturally affected, more or less, by the sentiment with which actions of that kind come to be generally associated, there is a new feature in the case not appertaining to the other cases. Instead of the desire of reciprocating good, which here of course can have no place, we have now the expectation of receiving a return of it from our neighbours. Without that expectation having at all entered into the motives of the action,

we feel when it has been done that the natural tendency of the benefit is to excite in the breast of the receiver, as well as in that of the spectator, a disposition to reciprocate the kindness. We look upon ourselves as the proper object of grateful thoughts, good wishes and courteous behaviour, not only on his part but generally. In a word, we are affected at once, although it may be transiently and faintly, with the gratification of a benevolent desire, with self-complacency, and with undefined hopes.

The contrary case is perhaps more remarkable. When we inflict pain or injury upon another, we contravene our own benevolent instincts, and we have generally a more or less lively sense of what he suffers — an idea which is in itself disagreeable to us. But here, as in the opposite case of doing good, there is a new feature. Instead of a desire for retaliation, which is of course out of the question, we now feel an apprehension of resentment on his part and on that of the community. We are aware of his strong wish to avenge himself, and we dread its consequences: we are sensible, too, of the public opprobrium ready to overwhelm us, and we cannot avoid associating with our own act (veiled as it is in the haze of self-illusion) somewhat of the same bitterness of condemnation which we should have experienced, had we ourselves been the sufferers.

The combination of these feelings, which are at

times exceedingly strong, usually takes the name of remorse, and it is often greatly aggravated by a vivid sense of having offended a higher Power.

The sentiments here described, I must again remark, are such as can scarcely take place with any regularity except in minds of some cultivation or under special circumstances; and they are constantly liable to be prevented or counteracted by civilised ignorance, bad habits, and strong passions, as well as by barbarism. Little remorse is felt by the savage when his violence causes misery in his own family or tribe, and none for the misery which he exults in heaping on his human prey. The moral insensibility and recklessness exhibited amongst the lost classes of our own population, might be described in similar terms, and I scarcely need point to the extinction of remorse, as to many actions ordinarily reprobated, in the wars of enlightened nations.

Although, for the sake of perspicuity, I have endeavoured to trace the distinct effects of the same or similar actions under the three predicaments, separately from each other, I have not been able to avoid altogether some reference to their reciprocal influence, and this may now be expressly taken into view.

Whatever may be the first effects of our moral experience, it cannot be doubted that when we not only are subject in our own persons to the actions of others, but witness similar actions between

indifferent parties, and do them ourselves to our neighbours, the sentiment prevailing in each case must be liable to a reflex influence from the other cases; and that by this influence it will be strengthened or intensified. Our moral approbation, for example, of a magnanimous action done by A to B is enlivened and enhanced by a recollection of having personally performed or personally met with similar conduct; and the self-condemnation felt in regard to some unworthy act of our own, is greatly aggravated by recalling the strong reprobation with which we visited the same fault in a neighbour; or by reflecting on the universal execration with which we saw it was assailed. In this way we come to associate certain intensities of moral sentiment with certain kinds of action, by whomsoever or to whomsoever performed.

I may also remark, what indeed I have already hinted, that although I have considered the modification effected in our moral sentiments according as actions are done to those we love, those in regard to whom we are neutral, and those we hate, only in the case of actions coming under the second predicament, because in them the modification is the most remarkable, yet similar effects might be traced on our feelings in the case of actions coming under the two other predicaments. It would be tedious, however, to go through such an exposition; and what has been said of one set of cases may be applied *mutatis mutandis* to all. Whether we are

the subjects of actions done by others, or are merely the spectators of actions between others, or the doers of actions to others, our sentiments will be modified by the circumstance of those *others* standing to us in the relation of friends, neutrals, or enemies.

With the moral sentiments the course of which I have endeavoured to describe, there is one circumstance necessarily mixed up, and of great influence in modifying the sentiments themselves, I mean the outward manifestations of them which actions call forth from those persons whom they directly or indirectly affect.

The principal manifestations of this kind are evidently efforts to gratify the natural desire of reciprocating pleasure or pain intentionally given. They are sometimes looks, sometimes gestures, sometimes tones, sometimes words, sometimes actions. They embrace the whole range of rewards and punishments, and their general effect may be stated to be the satisfaction of that desire for reciprocation just mentioned, and the encouragement or discouragement of the actions which have called them forth. The case of verbal manifestation is worthy of particular notice. We have an almost irresistible impulse to express in language the pleasure and gratitude we feel at kindness and beneficence, and our displeasure and resentment at intentional injury.

These verbal manifestations are almost invariably



employed whether they are accompanied by other actions or not. Other means may be wanting to show our gratitude and resentment, but these are always at hand: they are at once a relief to our feelings, and gratify or annoy the persons to whom they are directed, and by whom they are often deeply felt, constituting in fact a powerful instrument of reward and punishment. In regard to extensive classes of virtues and vices, they are the only direct means of encouragement and discouragement within our reach, and in certain states of society they exert a pervading control. They give to moral sentiments greater precision, and operate on the conduct with the effect of authoritative precepts.

The influence of the moral approbation and disapprobation of our fellow creatures as manifested in words, attains its highest degree (in civilized communities at least) when the expression of those sentiments proceeds from bodies of men or communities. Doubtless this influence is greatly enhanced by an apprehension of the material consequences to which the verbal manifestations lead, or with which they are frequently united — consequences to property, reputation, liberty, and life; but taking the expressed sentiments alone (however they may have been formed), their sway over the mind, when proceeding from large numbers or masses of men, is remarkable, prompting on the one hand to deeds of moral heroism, and on the

other warning from all that is base in general estimation and aggravating the remorse of guilt.

There is one objection which I foresee may be taken to the prominence I have given to resentment in my account of the moral constitution of man. I have represented it (in the usual narrow sense) as an essential ingredient in moral disapprobation, and consequently as a wholesome and laudable feeling, while it is generally regarded as a passion to be repressed and extirpated. To this it may be sufficient to reply that I am only taking human nature as it is, and showing the original elements of moral sentiment amongst which the desire for reciprocation always appears. Like other principles within us, it has, of course, its appropriate limits and is not to be indefinitely gratified; but it is so indispensable to the conservation of morals that society could not exist without it. The question is one of those, perhaps, in which authority may prevail with some better than argument, and I may refer the objectors to Bishop Butler, in whose writings, indeed, they may find both, and who has left us the best explanation and vindication of resentment that I can at present call to mind.

“The good influence,” he says, “which this passion has, in fact, upon the affairs of the world, is obvious to every one’s notice. Men are plainly restrained from injuring their fellow-creatures by fear of their resentment; and it is very happy that

they are so." Again, "That passion, from whence men take occasion to run into the dreadful vices of malice and revenge; even that passion, as implanted in our nature by God, is not only innocent, but a generous movement of mind. It is in itself, and in its original, no more than indignation against injury and wickedness." \*

\* Sermon upon Resentment.

## LETTER XV.

MORAL SENTIMENTS (*in continuation*).

IN the preceding letter I have shown, or endeavoured to show, that when actions which intentionally produce pleasure or pain are done by human beings to each other, and the effects of such actions as well as the intention are felt or discerned, they generate respectively moral approbation and disapprobation, varied in intensity according to the circumstances in which the actions take place.

If this feeling or discernment of consequences were perfect, and no other principles came into play, we should undoubtedly apportion our moral approbation and disapprobation according to the real tendencies of actions, and this would be the perfection of moral sentiment.

It is instructive to inquire how it is that the perfection here described is not attained; why the moral feelings of mankind, so far from conforming to the real effects of human conduct, are not seldom in extreme contrariety with them.

In the first place, it may be observed, that all which is necessary for engendering gratitude or

resentment is that a man should be pleased or displeased with an action, whether his feeling is well grounded or not. The action may be sudden and the feeling equally so. His pleasure or displeasure may be prompted by some partial view or momentary thought, or be merely the caprice of his temper, unaccountable even to himself; but it exists and may be recurrent on similar occasions. Hence it will be a mere matter of chance whether his sentiment regarding the action tallies with its actual consequences, or is at variance with them.

In the next place, to take more deliberate cases, we must bear in mind that effects are not always plain, simple, and direct; on the contrary, they are often obscure, complicated, and indirect: and this is sometimes true in regard to the consequences of actions, as it is in regard to those of other causes. Hence a complete appreciation of conduct would have to take into view not only immediate, unmixed, and clear, but in some cases remote, confused, and dim effects, which are for the most part matters of inference, not of actual cognisance, and concerning which mankind are exceedingly liable to fall into various and extraordinary errors, especially when they take no pains to be right.

This circumstance is alone sufficient to prevent, in certain circumstances, an exact adjustment of moral feeling to real effects. On the most favourable supposition, in the absence of all disturbing incidents, and even when we have time and ability

to think, we must occasionally mistake the true tendencies of conduct from sheer incapacity to follow them out, or from oversights and misconceptions in trying to do so; and if the thoughtful portion of mankind run into such errors, it can be no wonder that moral approbation and disapprobation with the multitude often fall in the wrong places. Moreover, the difficulty of ascertaining consequences, or the necessity of taking even slight pains to do it, in complicated circumstances and removed from direct observation by space or time, affords great room for those eccentricities of personal taste and caprices of imagination already referred to; whence human conduct is liable to be approved and disapproved on fantastic and whimsical grounds, or on no discernible grounds at all. Men, instead of rigidly ascertaining, are apt to save themselves trouble by fancying effects, and all complication of this kind gives occasion to error in moral sentiment. In consonance with these observations, we find that, as knowledge advances or retrogrades in a community, as habits of thinking and feeling vary, and as modes of living alter, the general approbation and disapprobation of the people very often change their objects or shift their direction. Actions formerly disliked and reprobated are discovered or imagined to be useful, or deemed to be agreeable, and are praised; while others once loaded with commendation insensibly slide out of vogue, or turn out to be

pregnant with evil, and become marks for antipathy and scorn.

In the third place, a fact of no little importance presents itself: our moral sentiments are not all formed from our own discernment or inferences, or even suppositions, of the consequences of actions whether immediate or remote, nor from our own direct likings and dislikings; but they are derived, to a very great extent, from tradition. We are in many cases not left to personal experience, but are taught and trained how to feel towards a given action, long before we can perceive the effects of it for ourselves, or have formed an independent taste to be gratified or offended.

If we suppose, for the sake of illustration, one original family existing in the infancy of the race, although the heads or progenitors of it, limited as they would be to their personal experience, would approve or disapprove actions according to their tendency, or rather as they liked or disliked them, whether according to their true tendency or not; the members of the family under their direction would regard many of the actions of each other with approbation and disapprobation at second-hand. They would so regard them, not from discerning or fancying anything in them of a beneficial or injurious, pleasing or displeasing nature, but simply from being told and trained to believe that the actions were respectively the proper objects of those feelings, and from seeing them treated

as such by the leaders of their little world. The influence of such impressions would extend itself (it is easy to see) more and more through successive generations; and if, originally, approbation and disapprobation had been wrongly applied, the actual moral sentiments of the community would, in process of time, be found to diverge widely from a conformity with the real effects of the conduct to which they were directed.

In this way mankind derive not only knowledge, but modes of feeling on particular occasions, from their forefathers; whence it may be affirmed with truth that the moral sentiments of any given people at any given time, have been formed partly from their own feeling and observation of the effects of human actions, partly from their whims and caprices, imaginations and suppositions, and in a very large proportion from tradition—*i. e.* from the blind impressions regarding such actions which have been left on their minds by their predecessors. We need not, consequently, be surprised at the numerous inconsistencies between moral sentiment and the real tendencies of conduct, prevailing in even civilised communities. It is by no means unusual to see actions of the most mischievous character looked upon with the warmest moral approbation; and, on the other hand, to find conduct positively calculated to exalt and benefit the world, treated with profound and intense repugnance; while it is equally common for neutral



actions to be ranked sometimes in one class and sometimes in the other.

In all such cases the sentiments, originally founded on the erroneous impressions of a former generation, may have been associated with the actions they cling to in the minds of its posterity from mere tradition, without the slightest discernment of effects and tendencies, or even the faintest intrusion of any peculiar tastes and fancies on the part of the actual holders. It may be added, to show the power of traditionary impressions, that even in very simple cases, where the immediate effects of an action are personally felt or discerned, tradition sometimes operates to overcome the natural feeling, and inspire us with approbation of that which, if left to ourselves, we should instantly and heartily reprobate. If I should be considered by some of my readers as going too far to assert that tradition can make black appear white, I might be regarded by others as stopping short of the truth to affirm that it can turn it very gray.

Powerful, however, as tradition may be, it is obvious but important to remark that the inherited sentiments of every generation are liable to be extensively modified by a struggle with the influence of circumstances and idiosyncrasies peculiar to itself. Every age, in a progressive country at least, has its own moral and social materials and its own impulses to actuate it in dealing both with them and with the opinions and feelings bequeathed to it.

These traditional modes of regarding actions, or, as they may be called, derivative moral sentiments, are frequently impressed on the mind by direct precepts or commands as well as by example, by instruction as to the tendency of the actions, by declarations of liking or aversion, and by other incidental methods. "You must do this," and "you must refrain from that," is the language of the superior to his dependents, often without any assignment of the grounds on which the injunction proceeds. The consequence is that actions come to be approved and disapproved amongst many people, and to a great extent, not because they are directly perceived or traditionally held to be beneficial or injurious, but solely because they are absolutely commanded or prohibited with no reference to any other circumstance or attribute: and thus morality is doubtless simplified to the multitude, who grow into the habit of only looking at rules without troubling themselves with effects and tendencies, except such as make their presence immediately felt. The readiest appeal is always to a recognised law or maxim. Indeed, some arrangement of acts under things to be done and things not to be done, simply as such, seems unavoidable; for in the absence of all constituted authority (were such a state of affairs possible for a permanence), the necessities of society would shape the mutual sentiments and conduct of men into a conformity with certain manifest requirements which, in the

course of time, would acquire the character of authoritative rules, and which would be appealed to as decisive in many cases without a fresh estimate of consequences or any other special considerations. In all this, although there is not of necessity any perversion of moral sentiment, which is the subject I am seeking to elucidate, there is no security that the actions approved or reprobated are beneficial or injurious, and the sentiments regarding them being mere prejudices stand little chance of being modified. If wrong, they will, in all likelihood, long remain so.

I have not hitherto particularly adverted to the influence of superstition in perverting moral sentiment, because it is, in truth, included in my account of the general causes operating to produce that evil result; and although from its importance it deserves not only a separate consideration, but a treatise to itself, I can here only touch upon it in passing. It is a marvellous problem how the minute and multitudinous rules and rites, and ceremonies and doctrines, originated and established themselves in some of the existing systems of superstition;\* but whatever may have been their sources, the grand instrument of perpetuating them, as well as their unhappy bearing on morality, has obviously been tradition. It is probable, or

\* The rise and establishment of the Mormons in our own day, within the very bosom of modern civilisation, is worth studying in this view.

possible at least, that in most cases they sprang to birth through the idiosyncrasies of individual human beings, men of more ardent minds, more vigorous thoughts, more exalted feelings, more ambitious desires, than their fellows, and who, finding themselves completely at sea in their aspirations and efforts after knowledge, imagined what they could not discover, and transmuting their own fancies into real events, gave them forth as mysterious and divine.

What, however, belongs to my present subject is a remarkable feature in most of these systems of superstition; their influence has operated not so much to pervert moral approbation and disapprobation in their application to the ordinary actions of life (although in that province it has largely and mischievously intermeddled), as to create false virtues and false vices and crimes, which it has foisted upon mankind by the alleged authority of supernatural beings equally fictitious. Nothing, perhaps, has done more to strip moral sentiment of its beneficial influence on society, or has entailed more positive misery on the human race, than these counterfeit virtues and vices, the profuse offspring of ignorance and imposture. It unhappily cannot be affirmed that they have disappeared before modern cultivation.

The account of the reasons which I have now assigned why our moral sentiments do not always conform to the real tendencies of actions, points

also to an analogous explanation of the differences in moral sentiment between one nation, one tribe, or one community, and another.

When surveying the condition of mankind in the various countries of which accounts have come down to us, or which have been visited and described in our own age, no one can help being struck with the great discrepancies existing amongst such nations as well in moral theory as in moral practice. I have already adverted to some of these discrepancies, and for my present purpose it is not needful to do more than touch on two or three further examples.

In one country the vice of lying is universal and venial; in another it is despised and scouted: one nation is licentious without shame, another enforces comparatively strict laws of chastity: there are tribes among whom stealing, and especially adroit stealing, is highly extolled; and there are others where, whether dexterously accomplished or not, it puts the perpetrator out of the pale of society; with some, cheating is a clever feat; with others, it sinks the man convicted of it into abject disgrace. Even the crime of murder, which is looked upon in some civilized countries with all the horror of which human nature is susceptible, draws little odium on the guilty in communities debased by ignorance and superstition.\*

\* Mr. Mill puts the case well and forcibly: "But where are these unanimously recognised vices and virtues to be

To anyone speculating on moral discrepancies such as these, it would necessarily appear an impossible feat, were it attempted, to take the peculiarities of every nation, or even of any one nation, as they exist, and trace them with precision to their several sources. But on the principles which I have explained, we shall be at no loss to discern generally how they may have arisen; or, at all events, we shall not feel much difficulty in seeing that the growth of great and even extreme discrepancies is unavoidable.

In a preceding page, in order to elucidate the divergence of moral sentiment in a community from the real tendency of actions, I supposed the case of a single insulated family: at present, in order to elucidate the discrepancies in moral sentiment subsisting between different communities, I will take the hypothetical case of two families.

Suppose two original families or tribes to be endowed with the qualities I have described (without which they could scarcely, indeed, be called human)—namely, the sensibility to pleasure and pain; the liking and disliking of the causes of such feelings; the propensity to reciprocate good

found? Practices the most revolting to the moral feelings of some ages and nations, do not incur the smallest censure from others; and it is doubtful whether there is a single virtue, which is held to be a virtue by all nations in the same sense and with the same reservations."—*Dissertations and Discussions*, by J. S. Mill, vol. ii. p. 498.

and evil received from other sensitive beings; the anticipation of similar reciprocity from them; and a certain measure of sympathy with all: suppose further the families so endowed to be severally placed in different climates, in different soils, at different elevations, with different kinds of animals and vegetables around them; and whatever moral similarity there may have been at the outset, they will in no long time inevitably diverge into different moral codes and practices merely from the operation of dissimilar surrounding circumstances; *i. e.* from different motives and courses of conduct being presented to their minds. But to these sources of discrepancy must be added the idiosyncrasies of each family, and especially of their chiefs. In no case can two men be constituted exactly alike, but they may be very widely dissimilar; and the personal tastes, propensities, passions, and aptitudes of our two hypothetical leaders, being left free to expand in the exercise of uncontrolled authority, will inevitably exert great influence, and in each case a diverse influence, on the minds and actions of their followers, who will also respectively contribute the play of their own idiosyncrasies to the general result.

Thus dissimilar physical conditions co-operating with dissimilar personal idiosyncrasies, will, in the lapse of time, place the two families under such different social regulations, and create such different moral feelings, that few points of complete

analogy will be likely to exist after the first stage of their career or in the next generation: and inasmuch as in every subsequent generation fresh idiosyncrasies, novel circumstances, and new results of experience, will mingle their influence, a few ages will probably suffice to produce two races exceedingly unlike in physical conformation, in customs, arts, manners, modes of thinking, and moral sentiments.

The discrepancies thus unavoidably resulting from the action of different circumstances on human beings who are alike in some qualities but unlike in others, serve to show how necessary it is to be extremely careful in our moral generalizations. For example, notwithstanding such striking discrepancies in moral sentiment as have been brought to view in the preceding exposition, it has been said by a great authority, where human feelings are concerned, that "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin." The saying is true enough, doubtless, of a very circumscribed world; true enough if applied to a multitude of men with similar culture or in a state of similar civilization: but there are many touches of nature extremely powerful in their effect on the sympathies of one community of human beings, which would not ruffle those of another community in the faintest degree.

Nothing perhaps warms the heart of an Englishman more than the heroism of a brave man



rushing into the water, at the hazard of his life, to save a drowning fellow-creature whom every spectator shows himself earnestly anxious to rescue: and it might be readily supposed that such sentiments of admiration at disinterested magnanimity and of anxiety for the preservation of human life, were indigenous to the race, and would be felt by every being in a human form.

Let us see, however, the effect of such an incident on the minds of a people trained under a totally different system of thought and feeling.

“As myself and a friend,” says a traveller in Burmah from whose pages I have before quoted, “were enjoying a morning ride by the lake-side at Kemmendine, our attention was attracted by a noise which proceeded from the opposite shore. We saw a man struggling in the water, and a number of Burmese (male and female) standing by, looking on, apparently unmoved by any feeling save that of amused curiosity. No one, judging from the attitudes of the spectators, would have thought for a moment that anything serious was the matter, especially as the sound of occasional shouts resembling laughter, was borne by the breeze across the water to where we were riding. It occurred, however, to my friend that the man in the water might possibly be in some peril, especially as he appeared to be a considerable distance from the shore. We accordingly spurred our horses on the instant, and soon reached the spot

where the spectators had congregated. It was as we conjectured might be the case. The struggling wretch was frantically endeavouring to reach terra firma, but had become exhausted by his efforts, and he sank immediately before our arrival. My friend (a good swimmer) instantly threw off his coat, plunged into the lake, made his way to the place where he had seen the drowning man disappear, and made several efforts to find him. In these, unfortunately, he was unsuccessful, the bottom being so foul as to render it impossible for him to effect his purpose. All this time the people on the bank were looking on, and repeatedly manifested their amusement at the several incidents of the scene in unequivocal bursts of merriment. My friend (a member of the Pegu Commission) rebuked them for their unseemly behaviour in pretty strong terms. They were, however, evidently but little concerned, although they listened to his reproaches with the respect which is due to authority; and as the last act of the pleasant little comedy had terminated, they very soon dispersed."\*

Incidents of this kind (and the example might be easily paralleled from other nations) serve to show that when we ascribe certain sentiments to human nature or to men universally on given occasions, because they exist amongst ourselves on

\* Four Years in Burmah, by W. H. Marshall, quoted in the *Athenæum*.

those occasions, it is by no means a safe inference: we cannot safely ascribe them except to men under analogous circumstances of knowledge and civilization.

We may attribute with confidence to most men and to most races of men, the rudimentary feelings which I have shown to originate and to constitute moral sentiment; and some of them with equal confidence to all men: namely, sensibility to corporeal pleasure and pain; liking the causes of one and disliking the causes of the other; the propensity to reciprocate both good and evil; the expectation of the same reciprocation; and more or less sympathy with other sensitive beings; but the direction and intensity of these emotions respectively it is often difficult and even impossible to assign: there are so many causes at work to counteract, or modify, or suppress such of these common susceptibilities as can be counteracted, or modified, or suppressed — to call them forth or to keep them in, that, unfurnished with precise knowledge of national and social circumstances, we cannot predict with confidence how they will manifest themselves on particular occasions. Without specific information of this kind we cannot safely pronounce that the people of rude or distant and imperfectly explored countries would, under given circumstances, share in those affections and moral sentiments which it seems contrary to our own very nature, under such circumstances, not to have.

Our general propositions regarding human nature, with the exceptions intimated and possibly a few others, should be limited to those nations and races which we have had an opportunity of knowing.

How feebly some of even the rudimentary affections enumerated exist in certain cases, has already been illustrated, and may be seen strikingly exhibited in various other Eastern tribes and nations besides those cited, whose style of civilization (if they may be called civilized) is thoroughly different from ours. The Rajpoots, for example, have, we are told, little sensibility, little compassion, scarcely any disposition to relieve suffering, or to resent wrong done to themselves or others. The feeble resentment of personal injury is an extraordinary trait in the picture and must not be mistaken for an indication of high culture. To have it deficient in strength below a certain point, is, in truth, a mark of moral inferiority.

Even in our own country we cannot always infer the feelings of one set of its inhabitants from those of another. Extreme diversities of moral sentiment (as extreme almost as those which characterise respectively Eastern and Western civilizations) are found in close neighbourhood. Take, for example, the latest questions of morality which have arisen amongst us—those, namely, which have reference to the process of thinking itself. While the man of highest culture sees clearly that

opinions, whether theological or anthropological, or geological or physiological, cannot be the proper ground of ascribing either merit or demerit, praise or blame, to the holder,\* there are thousands around him who feel the deadliest rancour against every dissentient from their traditional creed, and deem heresy from their own faith the blackest and most unpardonable of offences.

These are real moral sentiments, precisely parallel to those manifested by the Mahommedan in his savage animosity against the Christian unbeliever in the prophet of Mecca.

\* I am sorry to find that in this estimate of the present sentiments of cultivated minds, I am not altogether correct. That men reputed to be of high culture, and writing in our own day, still differ *toto cælo* on the important point mentioned in the text, is shown by the two following extracts, the antagonism between which needs no comment from me. "It is," says Dr. Tulloch, "the strangest and most saddening of all spectacles to contemplate the slow and painful process by which the human mind has emancipated itself from *the dark delusion* that intellectual error is a subject of moral offence and punishment."—*Leaders of the Reformation*.

"Men are blameable," says Dr. Whewell, "in disbelieving truths after they have been promulgated, though they are ignorant without blame before the promulgation;" and again the same moralist tells us, that it is man's "duty to think rationally." I am not the writer to quarrel with Mr. Mill (to whose "Discussions," vol. ii. p. 508, I am indebted for a knowledge of these most extraordinary declarations) when he designates them as "the very essence of religious intolerance." It seems I was as premature as Dr. Tulloch in thinking that such sentiments had vanished from cultivated minds. In the second extract how quietly, and unconsciously to all appearance, is infallibility assumed! For another point in literary morals, see Note D.

Such a review as I have now taken of the origin of our moral sentiments, and of the circumstances which cause those great discrepancies that undeniably exist between the moral sentiments of different nations, and even of different classes and individuals of the same nation, prepares the way for a further most momentous inquiry.

We see what the moral sentiments of nations are, how discrepant and contradictory; we look around us, and mark even in our neighbours how widely they vary; and we are unavoidably led to ask, Are all these diverse sentiments right by the very fact of their existence? or if this cannot for a moment be supposed, is there some way of determining amongst them which are right and which are wrong? Is there some test or criterion by which to decide points of so much vital importance? To the substance of these inquiries I purpose to address myself in the ensuing letter.

## LETTER XVI.

MORAL SENTIMENTS (*in continuation*).

TAKE any man you choose and you will find that his moral sentiments have arisen in various ways, such as I have already described; some from tradition, some from the commands of his superiors, some from his own direct likings and dislikings, some from the proclaimed likings and dislikings of others; while in many, if not all, of them, he may materially differ from his neighbour; or to place the matter, if he is an Englishman, beyond all doubt, from a Burman or a native of the Celestial Empire.

Now what security is there, what assurance can he feel, or how can he prove to his own satisfaction, or to the conviction of anybody else, that in any one important sentiment he is right, and the man who entirely differs from him is wrong?

The mere fact of his feeling the sentiment to be right, or of his being assured that it is in consonance with some injunction of his superiors, or of his believing that other persons feel the same, can be of no avail in proving its rectitude, because

the man who entertains a totally different sentiment may adduce the same or similar allegations in support of his own.

Amidst such contending claims and discordant appreciations, how shall we discriminate the right and the wrong? Is there any test, any quality or set of qualities, any method or expedient, by which the question can be determined?

Of this problem in Moral Philosophy which, in some shape or other, has, over and over again, been explained and discussed, the preceding account of the rise of our moral sentiments may perhaps help us to a solution as simple and direct as we can obtain from any other source.

If, as the foregoing review of their *genesis* has shown, moral sentiments primarily arise from our likings and dislikings of the actions of our fellow-creatures because they give us pleasure and pain, contribute to our happiness or our misery, or because we apprehend that they do so or tend to do so, it is evidently of the first importance to our well-being to take care that our likings and dislikings are well-founded — *i. e.* that the actions have really the several effects and tendencies ascribed to them; and although some cases in which our sensibility is directly affected, are so plain as to preclude doubt or hesitation, other cases, as we have seen, are more or less uncertain, or difficult, or complicated, so that some attention and



discrimination are required to trace the real effects produced. .

Such an examination whether our likings and dislikings are well-grounded seems to be, in all dubious cases, not only the right, but the only course that can be pursued in order to determine whether our moral approbation and disapprobation are correctly applied; and it is, indeed, the natural test resorted to (with more or less irregularity and inconsistency I admit) by men in general when their prejudices are not in the way to bar inquiry; while it is also that which the maturest wisdom would prescribe from a view of the consequences of applying it.

The end or use of moral approbation and disapprobation can be no other than to promote or prevent those actions to which they are respectively applied: and it is manifest that if the sentiments so named could be always directed and proportioned to the real tendency of conduct, we should attain the good in view in the fullest measure. Unless moral sentiments have no influence on the actions of mankind, they would then bear with their whole weight on the encouragement of such as contribute to the happiness of society, and on the repression of such as are inimical to it. Good actions would be multiplied, and the number of bad actions reduced.

It is remarkable that although the principle of trying actions by their consequences and approving

or disapproving them according to the goodness or badness of those consequences, has been denounced in various ways as being inadmissible; yet, on occasion, almost all moralists virtually adopt it, often unconscious of what they are about, especially when any new case presents itself "for which the file affords no precedent,"\* and which is consequently not encumbered by prejudices; or when they fall into momentary forgetfulness that they have a theory to maintain. While sitting in judgment even on what, for shortness, has been called the greatest-happiness principle, it is not uncommon for ethical writers to shake their heads in grave disapprobation, and pronounce it to be a mischievous doctrine; unconsciously applying to a theory the very test they in the same breath condemn when applied to an action.

The difficulty of applying such a criterion has been sometimes urged. The obstacles that lie in the way of tracing all the consequences of an action, have been alleged as depriving the test of practical utility. But the difficulty, whatever it may be, is only the same as we meet with in other inquiries, and other endeavours to form just estimates. We have nothing more arduous to do in determining the beneficial or injurious qualities of conduct, than what we have to do in ascertaining the wholesome or deleterious properties of food, or

\* Burke.

in tracing the good or bad influence of a statute. In each of these cases, subject as we are to error alike in all of them, we have to follow effects as far as we can; and it is by its ascertainable, not by its unascertainable consequences, that we pronounce an action, as we pronounce an article of sustenance, or a legislative enactment, to be good or bad, to be worthy of approval or of condemnation. The residuum of unknown effects, if any there is, must necessarily be left out of the question in all the three instances alike.

Of a great number of the most important actions of mankind, the main consequences to human happiness are, in civilized communities at least, plain and manifest to the parties interested in them; and of another large class, the main effects may be ascertained by a well-directed and diligent inquiry, leaving a comparatively few doubtful or indeterminate, except to the careless and the ignorant; and it is to this remnant alone, which can never be of great moment in any enlightened society, that the supposed objection can be applicable, while even then it is worthless. So far as the consequences of an action to human happiness are beyond the power of man to ascertain them, they are of no value; and if none of them are ascertainable, the action itself must be neutral or indifferent, neither good nor bad.

The criterion in question, for the reasons here assigned, is, I venture to think, not only excellent

in itself, but as readily available as analogous tests in other cases. If it were generally adopted and honestly applied, ethical discrepancies might still exist, but they would gradually disappear as knowledge advanced, and the moral sentiments would alight more and more upon their proper objects.

Another objection is sometimes urged of this tenour: "The criterion you advocate is good as far as it goes; it may be admitted that actions productive of happiness are rightly or wisely approved, and those by which it is injured are rightly or wisely condemned: but this is only a part of the matter; there are other *criteria* of right and wrong which the advocates of the happiness-test overlook. We continually put actions upon their trial by examining whether they are just or generous, or disinterested or benevolent, or the contrary; and we then approve or disapprove without reference to the happiness or the unhappiness which may flow from them; so that there are other tests perfectly distinct from the production of pleasure and pain, happiness and unhappiness, according to which actions are, and ought to be, morally approved or disapproved."

In order to simplify the examination of this argument, let us take one of the qualities enumerated, since what will apply to one will apply to all. We cannot do better than select the great moral attribute *justice*. If we make justice a test

of certain actions independent of everything else, we must unavoidably proceed on the grounds that it is in itself peculiarly pleasant or agreeable to us, irrespective of its other effects, which, by the hypothesis, are not to be taken into account; and that it obtains our moral approbation at once by that bare circumstance: for we cannot on any theory dissociate pleasantness or agreeableness from moral approbation, which it must precede.

So much being premised, I think it will be possible to show that the alleged test would be in perfect accordance with that proposed in the present letter, if it would not be identical with it.

Happiness, we must recollect, does not denote one homogeneous thing like air or water, but is a general appellation comprehending a great variety of feelings; all the agreeable affections of our nature, every kind of joy and pleasantness that we experience. Conduct which gives rise to any of these, makes the subject of them so far happy.

Happiness may, in fact, be considered as the genus, and all these pleasurable emotions as species under it; and when we would determine that a given action is a proper object of approbation on account of its producing happiness, we can do so only by ascertaining that it occasions some particular kind of pleasant or agreeable feeling.

There is no such thing as happiness in general, as there is no such thing as an animal in general. Happiness cannot exist except in the shape of

some agreeable emotion or combinations of agreeable emotions, any more than an animal can exist except in the form of an individual organism.

Hence if justice, as the objection alleges, is a quality naturally and directly giving a peculiar kind of pleasure independent of any other consequences, it follows that when any action which has to be tested by this standard, is determined to be just, and consequently worthy of moral approbation, the proceeding is precisely similar to that of the moralist who applies the criterion of the production of happiness. It is doing as he does — namely, assigning a quality which gives a peculiar pleasure, as the ground of moral approbation. Pronouncing it to be morally commendable according to the hypothesis, solely because it is just, is pronouncing it to be morally commendable because it produces one species of those pleasant states of mind which are arranged under the genus happiness.

I scarcely need add, however, that the mode in which a just action affects us, is altogether different from that which this objection would represent it to be. Whatever association may subsequently effect, a discernment of the conditions requisite to make an action just, must originally precede any pleasurable emotion and any approbation which it may excite, and this discernment involves a view, more or less complete, of consequences.

There can be no objection, nevertheless, with any moralist to making justice itself a criterion of actions; but why? Simply because that quality has already been determined, over and over again, to be one of the most beneficial principles which can enter into the conduct of man, and has established itself in our minds with a thousand subsidiary associations. This is, in effect, to say that it has already been tried by its consequences, and having triumphantly passed the ordeal, has become one of those intermediate principles which are found so useful and even necessary in practice. In every walk of life and department of knowledge, such intermediate aids are employed without recurrence to the principal standard. It is not requisite to measure an arc of the meridian every time it is wished to adjust the boundaries of a kingdom or ascertain the dimensions of an estate.

What sometimes seems to disguise our moral sentiments of praise and blame, is a class of feelings often mixed up with them, but of a distinct character. Such are pity, wonder, awe, admiration, the sense of the ludicrous, and other emotions, which, being dependent on variable circumstances connected with an action, may or may not accompany the moral approbation or disapprobation excited by it; but which, when they are present, may any of them give respectively to those sentiments a peculiar momentary character.

We may, for example, strongly approve of an action while we are greatly awed by it, and we may also as strongly condemn one, although it fills us with the same emotion. So we may look with decided approbation on a good act, while we cannot repress some degree of contempt for the intellectual weakness displayed at the same time by the agent: and we may reprobate vicious conduct, while we feel pity for the man who is guilty of it, or laugh at its ludicrous absurdity.

These, it is obvious, are accidental not necessary connexions, since the feelings described and the sentiments of moral approbation and disapprobation may exist detached from each other, and the former may some of them be occasioned even by material objects and physical events.

It would be a grave omission on my part in treating this portion of the subject, were I not to bestow some notice on a word which has made a conspicuous figure in many dissertations upon it, and the employment of which I have hitherto, as far as possible, purposely avoided — I mean *utility*. The question as to the criterion of morality in actions, has been frequently answered by this one word; and the answer, properly understood, comes to the same thing, in effect, as that which I have given in the preceding exposition. But utility in this connexion and for this purpose, is, I conceive, an objectionable term on several accounts. The epithet useful is not employed in



common language to indicate what is directly productive of happiness, but only that which is instrumental in its production, and in most cases customarily or recurrently instrumental. Although a blanket is of continual utility to the poor wretch who is starving through a severe winter, the benevolent act of the donor is not termed useful inasmuch as it confers the benefit and ceases. On the other hand, diligence in a man's calling is equally a virtuous quality; but since it can manifest itself only in a course of conduct, it can scarcely be said to confer happiness directly at any one point: it is the means of good; and utility may be appropriately predicated of it, although it could not be so predicated of benevolence.

Utility is thus too narrow a word to comprehend all the actions which are entitled to our approbation. We have not, indeed, in the English language, as far as I am aware, an uncompounded substantive which is capable by itself of expressing the two attributes of *conferring* and *conducting to* happiness. Perhaps for a descriptive phrase, *producing* happiness is as succinct as any, and comes the nearest to what is wanted; but still it is a circumlocution, and does not supply us with the desiderated noun.

Besides this objection to the word utility and its kindred phrases, there is another which has probably had some part in creating the distaste manifested towards the theory in which they are employed. The term useful is so frequently

fated to designate what is serviceable in the objects and affairs of common life, that in the minds of people in general it carries with it many homely associations, which, to the fastidious at least, cast upon it a degree of incongruousness with the higher parts of moral thought and feeling. Who, they ask, would tolerate the application of the epithet useful, to the heroic devotion of a great man to a great cause?

Hence the philosophical doctrine which erects utility as its banner, is apt to be deemed by the unthinking, low, mean, and derogatory to human nature and human aspirations, notwithstanding that the real import of the doctrine is wholly free from such a reproach.

Although the phrase is doubtless compendious and exceedingly convenient in default of a better, yet being thus liable to misconstruction and disparaging associations, it may be advisable to avoid the systematic employment of it in the exposition of the principles of morality, and especially to forbear placing it in the front of a theory.

Most of the trite objections to the true doctrine of morals, appear to me to turn on the narrowest acceptations of this term; and since the associations connected with it are not easily eradicated, the best way of dealing with the subject is, I conceive, to shun the language to which they attach themselves.

My account of the rise and formation of our

moral sentiments, also leads to the ready solution of another difficulty which has occasioned much discussion.

I allude to the question (whatever form it may be thrown into) "whether our moral sentiments have their origin in Reason or in a separate power called the Moral Sense?"

According to the view of man's sensitive and intellectual nature taken in the present treatise, this inquiry, which is generally rather vague in its terms, is soon disposed of.

We have seen that our moral sentiments in their rudimentary state, comprise sensibility to pleasure and pain; respectively liking and disliking their causes; consequent gratitude and resentment; expectation that these sentiments will be reciprocated; joy and sorrow for ourselves, and sympathy with the pleasure and pain of other beings. If you call these feelings collectively, or any part of them, a moral sense, or attribute them to the action of a moral sense, you may be doing no great harm, but you are only employing an additional term without at all elucidating the real facts which you seek to designate. We have not the various feelings described, and *also* a moral sense: take them away, and you have nothing left to constitute it. If you say that such feelings are the operations of the moral sense, you do not thereby enlarge the phenomena, or improve the classification: you are only creating a fictitious

entity which can furnish you, at the best, with no assistance, no guiding light, but may prove an *ignis fatuus* to lead you astray. The feelings in question (rest assured) are not the feelings of any sense, or power, or faculty, but they are *bonâ fide* your own—the feelings of the man.

Further: the feelings described cannot take place without your observing a number of circumstances attending them; such as the causes of the pleasure and the pain; nor without your inferring the intentions of the agents; nor yet (where intellectual discernment is not superseded by personal feeling) without noting the effects which the actions produce. Unless, in truth, these intellectual operations took place, no moral sentiments would rise up.

You may, if you like, ascribe such discerning and inferring, which are directly your own intellectual acts, to an imaginary power called Reason; and adopting a phraseology which I myself avoid, you may assert moral sentiments to be the joint product of reason and the moral sense. Such phraseology, however, is, in my opinion, eminently useless, and tends to obscure the truth. It is clear enough to any one capable of reflection, that the emotions I have already enumerated, the feelings of pleasure and pain, liking and disliking, gratitude and resentment, sympathy and antipathy, although they may rise simultaneously with intellectual states, differ, as mental phenomena, from the acts of

discerning and inferring their causes, their circumstances, and their effects; but it seems not only superfluous, but calculated to lead us into a wrong classification and a confusion of fact with fiction, to marshal these two sets of phenomena respectively under the appellations of moral sense and reason, when we have such excellent general names as *feeling*, and *discerning*, and *inferring*, for the described affections and operations; names which are simple and direct, and which, while they answer every purpose of philosophical thought and communication, have no tendency to mislead our imaginations, or vitiate our conclusions.

If, however, I were to answer the question before us in the conventional language in which it is put, I should unavoidably say that every moral sentiment (except perhaps such as may be acquired by mere rote) implies both an act of reason and an operation of the moral sense, inasmuch as in every case of the kind we discern, and we infer, and we feel.

The term *conscience* has sometimes been considered to be synonymous with moral sense.

Bishop Butler, in one place, speaks of it, not only as denoting the same thing as reflection, but as equivalent to "an approbation of some principles or actions, and disapprobation of others."\* The word, however, is more properly restricted, as

\* Fifteen Sermons at the Rolls' Chapel, p. 13.

Butler himself afterwards limits it, to the sensibility which every human being has, in regard to the moral qualities of his own mind and conduct.

As to the identification of *conscience* and *reflection*, I will pass it by with the remark that although reflection may doubtless accompany, for the most part, the feelings indicated by the former, yet there is obviously much reflection (however the phrase may be construed) which has nothing to do with self-approbation or self-condemnation; and therefore to identify the two words in question is plainly inexpedient.

The preceding exposition has facilitated the clearing up of any mystery or misapprehension which may surround the personification passing under this name of conscience. We have seen how our feelings in regard to our own conduct arise first from our necessarily looking upon our personal actions in the same light and with the same associations (modified to a certain extent) which invest actions done by others; and secondly, from our being at the same time the subjects on the one hand of regret and fear of consequences, and on the other of self-complacency and hope, as the nature of the action may be.

You may in this case, as in the other cases, create a fictitious entity and call it conscience: you may talk of its smiles and its frowns, its satisfaction and its violation, its stings and its

dictates, and its supremacy; but by so doing you only get an additional name in your moral vocabulary, with a crowd of figurative events which can do nothing else than embarrass your progress: you do not acquire an additional truth, or even an additional aid in your investigations. The man who has been guilty of some offence which he would condemn in another, and in regard to which he feels contrition together with a strong apprehension of resentment, reprobation, and reprisals from his fellow-men, and punishment perhaps from a Supernal Ruler, has not these feelings, so combined and mutually aggravated, *plus* the stings of conscience. The imaginary power with its figurative weapons and metaphysical punctures, serves only to obscure and perplex the actual facts which stand out by themselves with perfect clearness. It is a mere impersonation, convenient in common discourse or rhetorical declamation as a brief summary of mental events, but detrimental in close thinking or scientific inquiry.

So much misrepresentation of philosophical doctrines abounds, that I probably may be charged with denying man's moral nature, because I dispute the propriety, or rather scientific utility, of a personification; but it will be understood by any one of ordinary intelligence that I am only trying to put aside the verbal mask behind which moral facts, in themselves undeniable, are wholly or partially hid.

## NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.



NOTE A. — Page 2.

*Extract from Comte's "Philosophie Positive." — Tome I. p. 35.*

“ Ils ont imaginé, dans ces derniers temps, de distinguer, par une subtilité fort singulière, deux sortes d'observations d'égale importance, l'une extérieure, l'autre intérieure, et dont la dernière est uniquement destinée à l'étude des phénomènes intellectuels. Ce n'est point ici le lieu d'entrer dans la discussion spéciale de ce sophisme fondamental. Je dois me borner à indiquer la considération principale qui prouve clairement que cette prétendue contemplation directe de l'esprit par lui-même est une pure illusion.

“ On croyait, il y a encore peu de temps, avoir expliqué la vision, en disant que l'action lumineuse des corps détermine sur la rétine des tableaux représentatifs des formes et des couleurs extérieures. À cela les physiologistes ont objecté avec raison, que, si c'était comme *images* qu'agissaient les impressions lumineuses, il faudrait un autre œil pour les regarder. N'en est-il pas encore plus fortement de même dans le cas présent ?

“ Il est sensible, en effet, que, par une nécessité invincible, l'esprit humain peut observer directement tous les phénomènes, excepté les siens propres. Car, par qui serait faite l'observation ? On conçoit, relativement aux phénomènes moraux, que l'homme puisse s'observer lui-même sous le rapport des passions qui l'animent, par cette raison anatomique, que les organes qui en sont le siège sont distincts de ceux destinés aux fonctions observatrices. Encore même que chacun ait eu occasion de faire sur lui de telles remarques, elles ne sauraient évidemment avoir jamais une grande importance scientifique, et le meilleur moyen de connaître les passions sera-t-il toujours de les observer

en dehors ; car tout état de passion très-prononcé, c'est à dire précisément celui qu'il serait le plus essentiel d'examiner, est nécessairement incompatible avec l'état d'observation. Mais, quant à observer de la même manière les phénomènes intellectuels pendant qu'ils s'exécutent, il y a impossibilité manifeste. L'individu pensant ne saurait se partager en deux, dont l'un raisonnerait, tandis que l'autre regarderait raisonner. L'organe observé et l'organe observateur étant, dans ce cas, identiques, comment l'observation pourrait-elle avoir lieu ? ”

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NOTE B. — Page 105.

Of the incapacity to write good English frequently manifested by eminent classical scholars, whether from sheer carelessness or want of specific training, the celebrated Dr. Bentley is an acknowledged instance ; but I have never seen it remarked that his biographer, Dr. Monk, is open to the same criticism, although not, it may be, to an equal extent. For example, the learned biographer writes as follows: “These various pieces were entirely eclipsed by Middleton’s ‘Further Remarks,’ in which it was generally conceived that *he* had obtained a complete victory over Bentley, and that the certain consequence would be the abandonment of *his* scheme of a new edition : and when it was found that the publication was suspended, the *cause* was universally *attributed* to the *irrecoverable* blow experienced from *his* adversary’s publication.” If this passage, which would certainly discredit a schoolboy, does not show any transplantation of classical idioms into English, it shows a carelessness of composition which could hardly have proceeded from a trained English scholar. It will be observed that by the construction of the sentence the “*he*” and the “*his*” ought to refer to the same person, which they do not, — a confusion of antecedents more easily made in English

than in Latin, which fortunately possesses more distinctive pronouns. By care and skill, nevertheless, the grammatical disadvantage in our idiom may always be remedied. The error of speaking of a *cause* being *attributed* to a blow, is rather logical than grammatical, and is a strange oversight in any one accustomed to the orderly arrangement of his thoughts, although it is not uncommon in the casual writings of uneducated men. No reader needs to be told that we attribute effects to causes, not causes to themselves. Dr. Monk meant, but failed to say, that the effect—the suspension of the publication—was attributed to the blow as its cause. Even the expression “irrecoverable blow” is a solecism. The writer doubtless meant a blow from the consequences of which Bentley could not recover. We may say elliptically that a person *recovers from* a blow (meaning from the effects of the blow), not that he *recovers* a blow, and therefore we cannot speak of a “recoverable blow;” the nearest approach to it would be a “blow recoverable from,” which, barbarous as it is, would be correct. A similar remark, by the way, (with no reference to Bentley or his biographer) may be made as to the word *reliable*, now creeping into use without its preposition. “Aid to be relied upon,” or “reliable upon,” is shortened into “reliable aid.” De Quincey, who charges Coleridge with the coinage of this word, suggests *relyuponable* as more correct English\*; a form which few if any will be hardy enough to adopt.

But to return to Dr. Monk. These instances of bad writing in the biography, are not merely accidental. The same inaccuracy prevails more or less throughout. We are told farther on that Dean Hare “saw that the fruits of his own labour were at once driven out of the field,” which, indeed, is perfectly grammatical; but as we cannot suppose any allusion to harvest-home to be intended, it is clearly a rhetorical lapse: and in another place we are informed

\* Critical Suggestions on Style and Rhetoric, p. 244.

that Dr. Voss "was then recently dead." On one occasion the author writes "it would have been impossible *to have given*;" on other occasions he misplaces such phrases as *not only*; and repeatedly confuses the sense of his periods with stray pronouns, unable, like lost children, to tell to whom or to what they belong. If it be objected that such errors in Bentley and Monk are not ascribable to the classical pursuits and proficiency of the writers, they must at all events be allowed to prove that a lame and incorrect English style is compatible with eminent attainments in the learned languages; and they proclaim a truth too often neglected, that accuracy and purity of composition in our native tongue, must be attained by the same means which secure excellence in other accomplishments—special devotion to the object—and will not come by attending to anything else. Modern English is too often disgracefully loose and inaccurate, partly perhaps from a foolish contempt of verbal criticism—a reaction from the age of Kames and Blair.

The reader who wishes to prosecute the subject, and to see how negligent English composition is, even in some of our first writers, may consult such works as "The Rise, Progress, and Present Structure of the English Language," by the Rev. Matthew Harrison; "Modern English Literature," by Henry H. Breen; and "A System of English Grammar," by C. W. Connon. The last-mentioned author, who is an acute critic and master of his subject, computes the grammatical errors in Hallam's "Introduction to the Literature of Europe," to be about five hundred; and those in Alison's "History of Europe" to amount to the prodigious number of about fifteen hundred.\* Even such correct writers as Arnold and Macaulay furnish instances of careless composition in their best works. De Quincey roundly asserts that he had never seen the writer who had

\* Grammar, p. 106.

not violated English grammar.\* "It is remarkable," he says in another place, "that grammatical inaccuracies so common among ourselves, and common even amongst our literary people, are almost unknown amongst the educated French."† Why should such a reproach continue? Why should not English be written as accurately as French? To those who would disparage attention to these things as trifling or pedantic, I would recommend what the same author subsequently observes, that a sentence, even when insulated and viewed apart for itself, is a subject for complex art, and capable of multiform beauty. He adds that it is "liable to a whole nosology of mal-conformations." And further on in the same treatise, he maintains that style, or the management of language, ranks among the fine arts, and is able therefore to yield a separate intellectual pleasure quite apart from the interest of the subject treated.‡ But the weightiest consideration of all is the inseparable connection between thoughts and words. Inexact writing and precise thinking, in men at least who are accustomed to composition, are incompatible. The fear sometimes entertained that pedantic formality or stiffness would result from rigid accuracy, is wholly groundless. Accuracy when habitual is just as *lithe* as inaccuracy. It is a mistake to suppose that there are ease and grace in laxity and incorrectness. I will further support these views of the importance of the subject by two or three brief extracts from an excellent article in the "Quarterly Review" of April 1861 (p. 380). "To attain a power of exact expression," says the writer, "is the one end of true literary discipline." Again, "spoken language has eyes, hands, every movement on the face, every gesture of the body, every tone of the speaker's voice, to illustrate it as it flows. To written

\* Critical Suggestions on Style and Rhetoric, p. 198.

† Leaders in Literature, p. 91.

‡ Ibid. p. 93.

language all these aids are wanting, and the want of all must be supplied by special care for the right use of words. . . . It is the strength of exact fitness that has to be sought."

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NOTE C. — Page 177.

Art, both poetically and transcendently, is sometimes comprehended in Nature; but so long as Nature and Art continue to be compared and contrasted — an antithesis conspicuously pervading our literature — the philosopher, at least, should consistently keep to the distinction between them. The poetical amalgamation of the two may be seen in the following lines by as genuine a poet as ever sang: —

"‘Thou lov’st the woods, the rocks, the quiet fields!’  
But tell me, if thou canst, enthusiast wan!  
Why the broad town to thee no gladness yields?  
If thou lov’st Nature, sympathise with man,  
For he, and his, are part of Nature’s plan.  
But can’st thou love her, if she love not thee?  
She will be wholly lov’d, or not at all.  
Thou lov’st her streams, her flowers; thou lov’st to see  
The gorgeous halcyon strike the bullrush tall;  
Thou lov’st to feel the veil of evening fall,  
Like gentlest slumber on a happy bride;  
For these are Nature’s. — Art not thou hers too?  
A portion of her pageantry and pride,  
In all thy passions, all thou seek’st to do,  
And all thou dost?’"\*

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\* "Steam at Sheffield," by Ebenezer Elliott.

## NOTE D. — Page 240.

Although it is to be regretted that correct moral sentiments in regard to opinions and to the free communication of thought, are not yet, as we see in the extracts given in page 240, universal among even cultivated men, there is scarcely room to doubt that they will eventually become so.

The other point of literary morality (if I may apply that phrase to both cases) alluded to in the same page, and in which future improvement may be equally looked for, is the moral sentiments of the community in relation to public criticism. It is by no means generally felt at present, that the man who takes upon himself the office of public critic, takes upon himself also the same responsibilities as those which devolve upon the judge in a court of law. Impartiality in the reception of evidence, anxiety to understand the cause, patience in mastering details, conscientiousness in the decision, and, what these imply, exemption from bias, freedom from private motives whether of favour or of hostility, are just as incumbent on the critic as on the judge. No one who does not sincerely and earnestly strive after these qualities is fit for either function.

It is a subject for rejoicing that an improvement in moral sentiment on this point, at least in the higher regions of criticism, has taken place, since the days when Scott declared \*, apparently without a blush, that in one of his reviews he was governed by other motives than the desire

\* See his account of writing an article on the Curse of Kehama for the "Quarterly Review," in which he confesses he gave as much weight as possible to the beautiful passages, and slurred over the absurdities, adding, that if the order of the day had been to tear it in pieces, he would have made a very different hand of it indeed.—*Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol. II. p. 302.

to do justice to the author and the public; when Southey wrote articles marked with such undue asperity as to draw from him an acknowledgment of repentance\*; when Jeffrey could commence a criticism on a volume of genuine poetry by the contemptuous expression, "This will never do," or something équivalent to it; and when the same critic wantonly held up to derision a man of real genius and modesty, of whose personal character and habits he knew nothing, by representing him as intoxicated with weak tea and the praises of sentimental ensigns.

With the great critics of our own day such unprincipled criticism and insulting language are, it is to be hoped, impossible; and if they may still be occasionally met with in the lower walks of literature, we must recollect that moral meliorations of this nature spread but slowly downward. The time, however, will most assuredly come, although we of this generation may not live to see it, when the public critic will be required by the voice of the community to be as scrupulous in his decisions as the judge on the bench; and when it will be generally questioned whether, with the view of attaining that end, the former functionary ought not to be placed like the latter under the salutary

\* If we may trust Southey's own account of the state of criticism in his day (and he lived in the very midst of the turmoil), it was deplorable enough. "For one competent critic—one equitable one—there are twenty coxcombs who would blast the fortunes of an author for the sake of raising a laugh at his expense."—*Life by his Son*, Vol. IV. p. 351. The confession made by himself is, "Of all my literary misdeeds, the only ones of which I have repented have been those reviews which were written with undue asperity, so as to give unnecessary pain."—*Ibid.* Vol. III. p. 222. Coleridge, writing about the same time, or earlier, may be cited as confirming Southey's representation in the first of the above extracts. "Books," he says, "at present seem degraded into culprits, to hold up their hands at the bar of every self-elected, yet not the less peremptory judge."—*Biographia Literaria*, Vol. I. p. 59.



check of publicity, *i. e.* of being personally known as the dispenser of the award.

The point even now is sometimes mooted, whether it is right that individuals who assume the office of issuing public verdicts affecting, often deeply, the well-being of their fellow-men, should pronounce those verdicts behind an impenetrable screen.

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